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RETRO
AMIGA 500
Commodore's last roll of the dice remembered

FULL REVIEWS
- HARDWARE ONLINE
- FINAL FANTASY TACTICS ADVANCE
- JAK II: RENEGADE
- JEDI ACADEMY
- FIRE WARRIOR
- CHROME
- TRON 2.0
- BOKTAI

PGR Project Gotham Racing 2

Fast, sleek and designed to perfection. The car's not bad either…




eMag

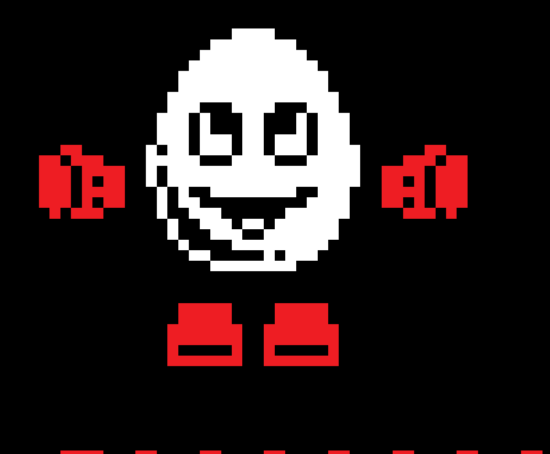
With *Gran Turismo 4* already jostling for racing fans' attentions, it's almost inconceivable that any other driving game will get a look in. But Microsoft and Bizarre Creations think otherwise. They've already impressed gamers with *Project Gotham Racing*, a title that had all the bells and whistles that Xbox gamers have become accustomed to, but with gameplay and circuits that hardly differed from its predecessor, the superb *MSR* on the Dreamcast.

The sequel, however – which was set to go head-to-head with Polyphony's racing giant this Christmas – is already shaping up to deliver the consummate racing experience. It already boasts a plethora of new tracks, much-needed and innovative support for Xbox Live and, while the Kudos system remains, we're confident that Bizarre Creations has tweaked and refined the game to spark the interest of even the most jaded petrolhead.

With *Gran Turismo 4* having slipped to 2004, it now seems that Bizarre Creations' effort has the perfect opportunity to race to an early lead. One thing is certain, however – even in the face of such a successful franchise like *Gran Turismo*, *Project Gotham Racing 2* won't be left at the back of the grid.

Simon Phillips, Group Editor





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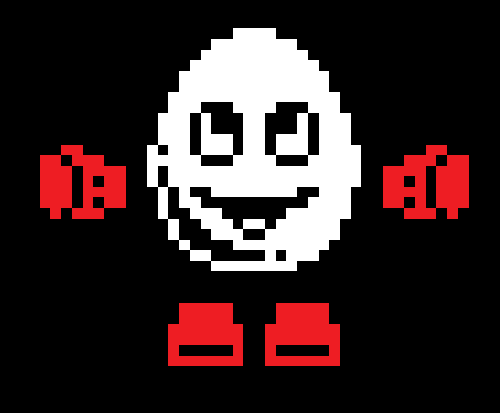
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Billy gets all heroic, despite Paper Lace's warnings…

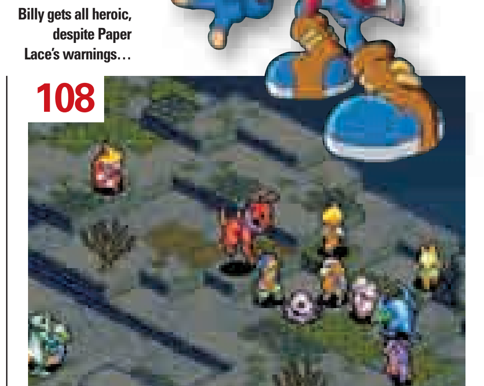
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Gabe Logan's back for a fourth and final outing. Or is he? And will the Syphon Filter be revealed?

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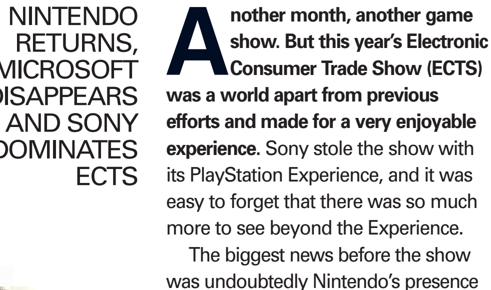
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FIND OUT WHERE TO GET THE ESSENTIAL STORIES WITH OUR QUICK GUIDE TO THE NEWS

THE THIRD GREATEST SHOW ON EARTH

NINTENDO RETURNS, MICROSOFT DISAPPEARS AND SONY DOMINATES ECTS



Another month, another game show. But this year's Electronic Consumer Trade Show (ECTS) was a world apart from previous efforts and made for a very enjoyable experience. Sony stole the show with its PlayStation Experience, and it was easy to forget that there was so much more to see beyond the Experience.

The biggest news before the show was undoubtedly Nintendo's presence after a three-year hiatus. Nintendo's stand consisted of a 40-ton truck along with a massive screen for showing off *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* "This year's

ECTS was the perfect opportunity to showcase our strongest ever software line-up for Xmas for both GameCube and Game Boy Advance," said Shelly Friend, head of Nintendo PR. "We particularly wanted to give people the chance to play the final version of *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* prior to its launch."

ECTS has been criticised in the past for its inability to draw in the big names throughout the industry, but this year saw a marked improvement with only a few major companies (including Codemasters and Microsoft) failing to have accessible stands. It would have been nice to have had a Microsoft presence, but seeing that ECTS is so close to its annual X0 event, the firm's absence wasn't surprising.

Of course, ECTS wasn't just about the return of Nintendo, and among the peripheral stands and dubiously dressed ladies were plenty of new games. While many were little more than repeats of footage or code from E3, it was the perfect opportunity to reacquaint ourselves with some great titles. One game in particular was receiving huge amounts of interest. "The thing that gobsmacked me was the enormous queue for *Half-Life 2*," said Debi Coster, ELSPA's PR. "Some of the people had been there so long they had keeled over and were lying on the floor, oblivious to the crowds stepping over them." It's good, then?

ECTS HIGHLIGHTS

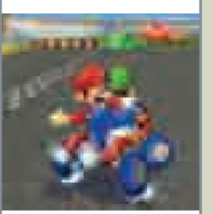
Ignoring the gorgeous ladies who were mingling about the show's floor, we dug out some of the more impressive games that were playable or in video format at this year's ECTS…



METAL GEAR SOLID 3

FORMAT: PLAYSTATION2

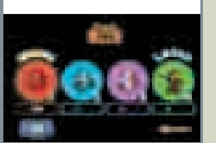
Despite only being available in video form, Kojima-san's third instalment in the *Metal Gear* series was looking very impressive. We particularly loved the James Bond-inspired intro, complete with plenty of over-the-top warbling. Kojima himself was also on hand in the PlayStation Experience – needless to say the queues were pretty long.



MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!

FORMAT: GAMECUBE

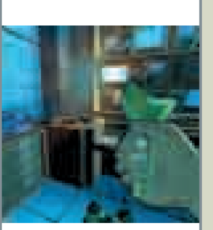
***Double Dash!!* at ECTS was a massive improvement over the E3 build and delivered a much faster and responsive ride than before. Games were played in specially mocked-up karts and you could clearly see the amount of effort that Nintendo had put into presenting its flagship title.**



PAC-MAN

FORMAT: GAMECUBE

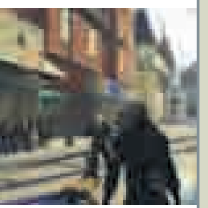
Although we had initial reservations, Namco's reinterpretation of its classic title worked surprisingly well. In fact, once we got started, you couldn't get us off the damn thing. Unfortunately, its reliance on connectivity may prove to be the game's downfall.



XIII

FORMAT: MULTIFORMAT

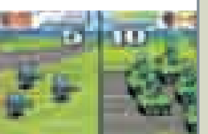
Rightly receiving the ECTS 'game of the show' award, *XIII* is shaping up very nicely indeed. The cel-shaded look suits the game perfectly and the responsive controls means that it controls like a dream. This is the second time in a row that Ubi Soft has received the prestigious 'game of the show' award, as *Splinter Cell* picked up the accolade last year.



HALF-LIFE2

FORMAT: PC

Easily one of the most impressive-looking titles on display, *Half-Life 2* may have entailed a long wait, but it was definitely worth it. Incredible visuals and dynamic physics combined to create a realistic atmosphere that was unmatched by the majority of the games on show. While rumours abound that the game could very well slip to later in the year, many gamers are going to be more prepared to wait for it.



ADVANCE WARS 2: BLACK HOLE RISING

FORMAT: GAME BOY ADVANCE

Not only did *Advance Wars 2* receive the ECTS award for 'best handheld game' it also had a huge amount of gamers clamouring to see it at the Nintendo stand. With the title due to hit stores any day, it was the perfect chance for fans of the original to see where Intelligent Systems had taken the sequel.

Data Stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



NINTENDO AND SONY GET A LIFE

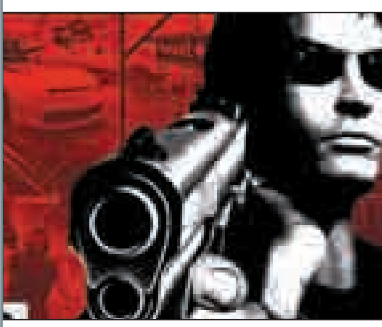
Although the final specs for PlayStation3 and GameCube 2 are a fair way off, Valve's Doug Lombardi has let slip that *Half-Life 2* may be one of the first titles for the new formats. Although the game is expected to launch on Xbox next year, Lombardi stated that Microsoft hasn't signed an exclusivity deal, saying: "We will also see this game on the next consoles by Sony and Nintendo." Of course, it's likely that neither console be on sale until 2005/06, by which time the *Half-Life 2* graphics engine will look a bit dated…

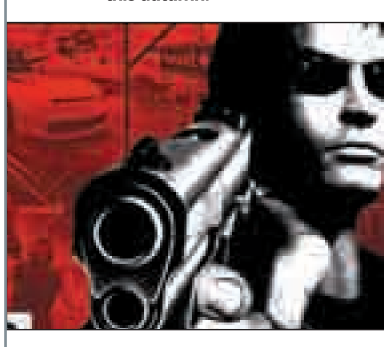




STREET VIBES

Not to be outdone by *Grand Theft Auto*'s epic soundtrack, Activision has announced that its upcoming action driving game, *True Crime: Streets Of L.A.*, will feature over 50 original tracks written by some of the world's best-known rap artists. The line-up includes Ice T, Jay-O-Felony and Bad Azz, while the undisputed star of the show is Snoop Dogg, who will be supplying the title theme to the game. A double CD featuring a selection of the tracks on offer will be released on Universal this autumn.





SONY'S PLAYSTATION EXPERIENCE PULLS IN THE CROWDS AGAIN

ARE YOU EXPERIENCED?

Queue! Queue like your life depended on it!

When Sony unveiled its PlayStation Experience to the public at last year's ECTS it was a great success. So it was no surprise to see the event return this year. Naturally, we wanted to see if the Experience could sustain the popularity of last year's show, so we went to Earls Court to find out for ourselves.

Predictably, Sony's event was a roaring success and saw gamers of all ages congregating in their hundreds to grab a few precious minutes at a multitude of game pods. Learning from last year's mistakes, the PlayStation Experience had more floor space (albeit at the expense of ECTS) and the show was less claustrophobic, though just as loud. Unsurprisingly, it was titles like *Gran Turismo 4*, *True Crime: Streets Of L.A.* and the EyeToy that were impressing the majority of gamers, with *Gran Turismo 4* pods almost continually surrounded by crowds and queues.

"The PlayStation Experience is a major event for us," said David Wilson, Sony's head of PR. "We invest a great deal of time, effort and money into realising this show. Given that the goodie bag people walk away with is worth more than the £6 most people paid to get in, this isn't about making money, it's about giving something back – a great five hours of entertainment with live music, one hundred new games being showcased, gaming superstars and martial arts and breakdance showcases… The feedback we received was overwhelmingly positive – a genuine feel-good experience."



Gran Turismo 4 was a highlight of the new games on display, and plenty of gamers showed up to get a preview of the PlayStation2's forthcoming titles. Nice to see the kiddies turning up too – fun for all the family…

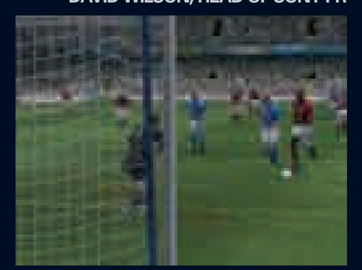


"THE FEEDBACK WE RECEIVED WAS OVERWHELMINGLY POSITIVE – A GENUINE FEEL-GOOD EXPERIENCE"

DAVID WILSON, HEAD OF SONY PR

One of the most evident things about the PlayStation Experience is just how closely Sony has its finger on the pulse of today's gamers. Despite the expected throngs of male gamers, there was also a surprising amount of families milling around the crowded pods – further proof that that the PlayStation2 seems to have the mass appeal that seems to currently elude Microsoft and Nintendo. "The majority of our audience still fits the older demographic, and the core gamers still have plenty on offer," said Wilson. "But if we can bring new people into gaming, we don't think that's a bad thing. It was really gratifying to see the broad range of age and gender of folk in the Sing booths, the ball pit [specifically aimed at younger games such as *Dog's Life* and *My Street*] and the EyeToy of course."

One particularly interesting aspect of the show was just how well the various online games were received. "People seemed to get a buzz from actually blowing people up in *Hardware* when they were sitting right



next to them," said Wilson. "Perhaps surprisingly, given that it is a cerebral game requiring an investment of time, I never saw a free seat in the *EverQuest* area either." *Resident Evil Outbreak* also proved extremely popular and was constantly occupied by gamers who were keen to see where Capcom had taken its beloved franchise.

With the entire show overseen by *Pop Idol*'s Neil 'not actually a doctor' Fox, *Bits*' Emily Newton Dunn and a host of celebrities through the three-day event, Sony has ensured that its machine will be on everyone's minds come Christmas. Nintendo and Microsoft take note.

PLAYSTATION EXPERIENCE HIGHLIGHTS

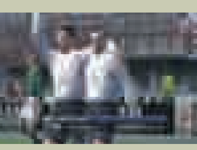
There were plenty of games on show, but here are just a few of our favourites

Gran Turismo 4
Polyphony's racer was definitely the highlight of the show. Gorgeous graphics, exceptionally good handling and some excellent tracks should ensure that this sells by the shedload once it's finally released.

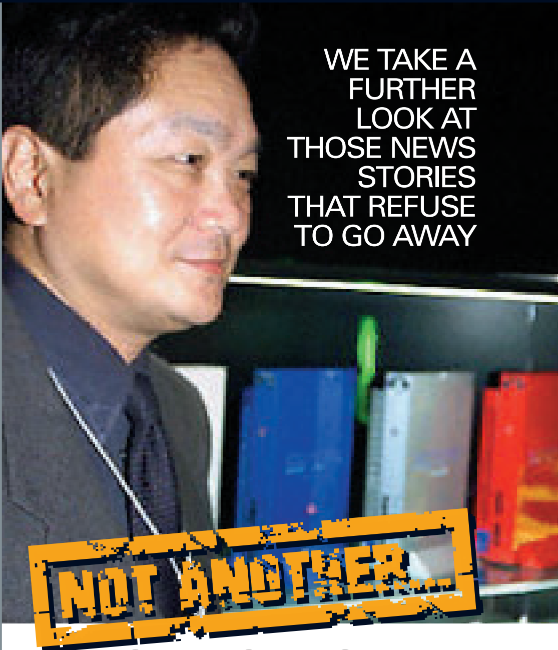


Resident Evil Outbreak
Judging by the amount of time it took us to fight our way onto the pods, there are still plenty of gamers around who are more than happy to return to Raccoon City. Whether this will appear before Christmas remains to be seen, but it's quite possible that Capcom will have another hit on its hands.

Pro Evolution Soccer 3
There were plenty of sport titles at this year's experience (most of which were packed into an overcrowded sports stadium stand), but nothing could compete with the sheer excellence of Konami's continuing franchise.



Return Of The King
After the lack of a second player in *The Two Towers*, it was a pleasant surprise to see just how well it had been implemented for the sequel. The gameplay is still instinctively old-school, but this was a great deal of fun.



WE TAKE A FURTHER LOOK AT THOSE NEWS STORIES THAT REFUSE TO GO AWAY

NOT ANOTHER... PSP STORY

With the amount of extras that Sony is planning for its new PSP, it's going to be amazing if gamers will be even able to lift the machine. No doubt to steal some thunder from the recent release of Nokia's N-Gage, Sony's upcoming handheld will incorporate both mobile phone and digital camera functions. "Not only will it be a form of entertainment but also a valuable communications device," revealed Ken Kutaragi, SCE's chairman. And that's not all. The machine's layout has finally been revealed and although no official pictures have been released, we're getting a firmer idea of what it could eventually end up looking like. The familiar four-button layout that PlayStation owners are so used to will be making an appearance along with one analog stick to complement the PSP's D-pad. This will quite likely mean that any FPSs will feature similar gameplay mechanics to many Dreamcast titles.

Quite frankly, we're getting confused by all these multi-functional handhelds. What with Nintendo repeatedly stating that the PSP and N-Gage are not serious challengers to the Game Boy Advance, and Nokia claiming that its new machine is "a games machine first and a phone second" we're having trouble wading through the seas of hype.

With the new PSP looking likely to come with every gadget under the sun, it's hardly surprising to learn that Sony is also concentrating on the PSP's software. In a bid to keep its new machine safe from unscrupulous pirates, Sony is already taking plenty of precautions. "Various forms of protection, which I can't divulge, will be incorporated into the physical media itself," said Kutaragi-san. "Software piracy won't be a problem if the protection system is as complicated as the one planned for the PSP."



BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



SAYONARA TO SONY

Although Sony has been hyping up its proposed PS3 backwards compatibility over the last month, the company has been somewhat less forthcoming with information regarding the departure of its chief technical officer, Shin'ichi Okamoto. Believed to be one of the key team members working on the development of Sony's next console, Okamoto-san was also responsible for structuring the PS2 online network. Although nothing has been confirmed, rumour has it that Okamoto-san is due to start up his own company focusing on network gaming.





MUSIC OF THE NIGHT

Konami has confirmed that the Japanese version of its 3D *Castlevania* game, *Lament Of Innocence*, will come with a free CD soundtrack when released on 28 October. Details are sketchy, but it's thought that a selection of tracks, composed by Michiru Yamane, will be included on the disc. Yamane-san's work plays a key part in creating the gothic atmosphere of the games. Unfortunately, it's not yet clear whether the US and European versions will come with the CD, but we're certainly keeping our fingers crossed.



WE RUN NOKIA'S NEW MACHINE THROUGH ITS PACES

IT'S TIME TO N-GAGE

After Nokia's recent insistence that the N-Gage is "a games machine first and a phone second," we were intrigued by the company's new marketing direction and were keen to try out the newly released machine. Arriving before Sony's PSP but two years after the Game Boy Advance, is this the new king of handhelds?

Away from the noise and non-removable pods of ECTS, the N-Gage is certainly very comfortable to hold. Your thumbs rest instinctively on the raised '5' and chunky D-pad and the rest of the buttons are nicely laid out either side of the 176x208-pixel screen.

With a similar design to the original Game Boy Advance and old-school joypads, the first thing we noticed was the lack of any shoulder buttons. When you realise that the top of the N-Gage is what you'll be speaking into, it's hardly surprising to find them absent. Nevertheless, we still feel that this oversight could have been rectified.

Switching on the N-Gage, you're treated to a tidy menu that includes everything you'd expect to find on a standard phone screen. Games are selected from here and within seconds we were playing *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater*. And we were impressed… After the 3D isometric view of the GBA series, seeing a perfect port of the PSX game is nothing short of stunning. However, in attempting to play a little *Tomb Raider*, we discovered the N-Gage's biggest flaw. Changing games requires you to slide the back off, take out the battery and then change the SIM card-sized game. Despite being told this is necessary due to the small size of the game cards, we can't help but think that this is a great inconvenience that could cost the N-Gage dearly. Add to this the numerical keypad that simply can't cut it when playing the majority of the games we tested and you have to wonder who the N-Gage is aimed at. At £220 it's ridiculously expensive compared to a GBA, and the hassle of changing games, along with the ludicrous way that you have to hold it to your ear when using it as a phone, is likely to make it unpopular with standard phone users (particularly those who are used to simply downloading their games). With the PSP drawing ever closer and the GBA riding high, Nokia's marketing men had better come up with something good.

TOMB RAIDER

Games like *Tomb Raider* reveal the N-Gage's graphical power – we're treated to a glorious 3D game world. But despite the gloss, *Tomb Raider* simply can't cut it in this generation of adventure games, with the biggest culprit being that numerical keypad – the awkward controls make for a unenjoyable experience.

PANDEMONIUM

Crystal Dynamics' PlayStation title initially seems like a rather poor choice of game to



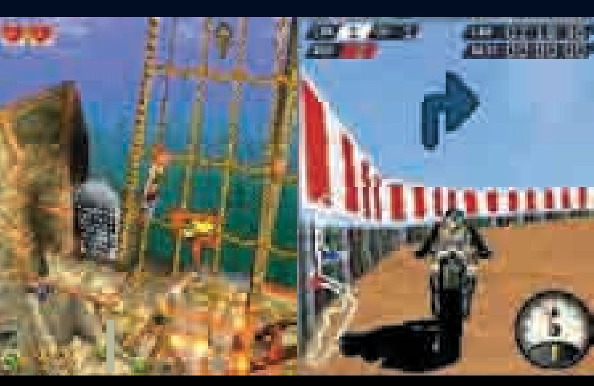
NOKIA NEED TO KNOW

Q) HOW LONG DOES THE BATTERY LAST?
Three to six hours depending on the game you're playing.

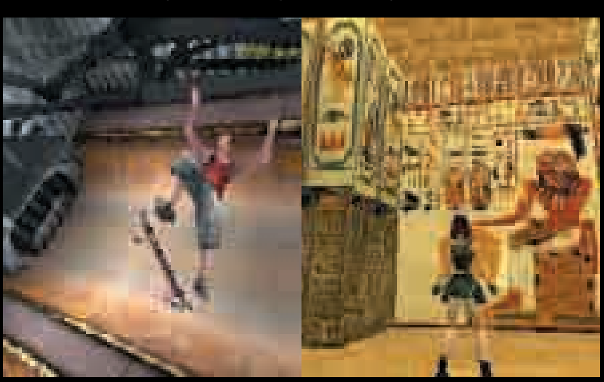
Q) WHAT HAPPENS IF THE PHONE RINGS?
When the phone rings simply pause the game then go back to it. You can also listen to the radio when playing games if you like.

Q) DO I LOSE MY SETTINGS WHEN I CHANGE GAMES?
No, the N-Gage comes with built-in flash RAM.

Q) CAN I BUY THE NOKIA ON CONTRACT?
"Whilst Nokia does not set retail prices, the indications are that we should see Nokia N-Gage available from as little as £99 with a network contract, and up to £219 SIM free" – Sara Diamond, PR, GBC (for Nokia)



Famous names, famous games – but can they cut it on the N-Gage? And how will the machine fare?



port, but it actually works very well. Visuals are of an extremely high standard, the controls are responsive and there's plenty to do. Niggles are mainly with the small screen – enemies suddenly appear without warning – but it's still much better than *Sonic N*.

MOTO GP

It's a shame to see that the brilliance of this Xbox title hasn't transferred to the small screen. The visuals are very poor, with some shoddy textures and an alarming amount of pop-up. Sound is also pretty atrocious. There is a four-player option, but the twitchy controls and lack of other N-Gage owners means that this is currently little more than a gimmick. Sadly, this racer never gets into first gear.

TONY HAWK'S PRO SKATER

Like *Tomb Raider*, *Tony's* fantastic 3D levels are a world away from those found on the GBA so it's much easier to see what your skaters are doing. Controls are reasonably responsive, though they lack the tight precision needed to excel at a game of this type. With plenty to do, some impressive visuals and a faithfully recreated soundtrack, this is *Hawk* heaven. The N-Gage's small screen can cause a few problems, but this is the best of a bad bunch.

games™ THE TOP FIVE

GAMING SPECIAL MOVES

No.5 STREET ALPHA 3
Nobody throws a Super Taunt like Dan

No.4 PANZER DRAGOON ORTA
That shooting will drive you Berserk…

No.3 MOONWALKER
Jacko turns foes into twinkle toes

No.2 FINAL FANTASY VII
Knights Of The Round… Is it over yet?

No.1 KILLER INSTINCT
Death by forbidden fruit. Terrifying.

BREAKING NEWS FROM MICROSOFT'S PRESS EVENT

X MARKS THE SPOT

Nice in sunny France was the European location for Microsoft's annual press show, and while the event didn't promise everything we had hoped for, there was still plenty on offer. Despite the non-appearance of *Perfect Dark* and *Pro Evolution 3*, and the lack of playable code for *Halo 2*, there were a few big stories.

The biggest announcement of the show was the revelation that Epic Games has signed an exclusive deal with Microsoft that would see future titles appearing on Xbox and Windows only. "We're delighted to be working with Microsoft," said Jay Wilbur, vice president of business affairs at Epic Games. "We feel strongly that, in partnership with Microsoft, Epic Games and Scion Studios will provide gamers with spectacular entertainment on Xbox and Windows platforms." Gamers fearing countless *Unreal* games should be pleased to hear that Epic Games and its new Scion Studios will be exploring new franchises after the next *Unreal* game hits the Xbox.

Another disappointment was the lack of any future pricing deals on the Xbox and its Live service. Rumours abound that the Xbox will drop to £100 by Christmas but Microsoft is refusing to reveal anything. In fact, the only thing it would confirm is that a new game will be announced this coming February (our money's on *Sabre Man Stampede*). There'll be an in-depth report from this event in the next news-packed issue of **games™**.



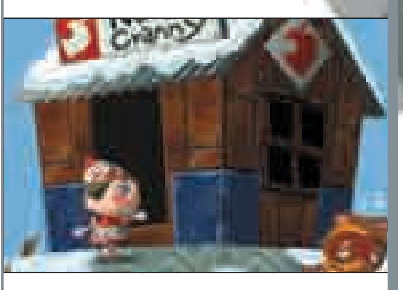
Data stream

BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



E-NOUGH IS E-NOUGH

The European release of Nintendo's e-Reader has always been in doubt, and when the proposed October 2003 launch was cancelled everyone assumed the worse. But it has emerged that Nintendo has yet to make a final decision on the release of the device, which reads data scanned from e-Cards, including code for entire NES games. *Animal Crossing*, Nintendo's quirky life sim remains in a similarly shaky position. Nintendo has yet to respond to reports that both products will launch here during the first half of 2004.





KABOOM IMPLODES

It's been revealed that Kaboom Studios has gone into receivership. Behind such hits as *Conflict: Desert Storm*, the company was made up of three separate development houses – Silicon Dreams, Attention To Detail and Pivotal Studios. Kaboom had been struggling for a while, despite its claim of being 'Europe's largest independent, interactive computer games developer'. The first sign of trouble arose in August when Attention To Detail closed, followed by Silicon Dreams. The fate of Pivotal Studios still hangs in the balance as the company has been put up for sale.





There it is. Well, maybe. Erm, we're not so sure.



AFTER NUMEROUS DELAYS, THE PHANTOM IS FINALLY 'REVEALED'

AS REAL AS IT EVER WAS

While new consoles are usually unveiled at showy press conferences or industry events, Infinium Labs maintained the mystery of its Phantom console by announcing it on the Internet. Launched on 18 August, www.phantom.net revealed the machine's full specifications as well as a few renders of the actual console – something that surprised sceptics everywhere.

Although the site currently states that the Phantom has 256 MB of DDR RAM (which sits awkwardly with the rest of the console's more impressive specs), Phantom's PR, David Frederick, assures us that the eventual retail machine will actually house a more realistic 512 MB DDR RAM. "We felt that this was not only a strong baseline to build from, but provides more RAM than any other baseline technology platform out of the box as a standard component," he explained.

The Phantom will enable users to download the latest games over a secure broadband service, but there are no plans as yet to allow gamers access to any other forms of media. "While the technology platform is enabled to perform that task," Frederick said, "we're currently focusing on delivering the best game experience for our Phantom Game System customers".

Whilst there's a strong chance of the Phantom taking off in America, we can't help feel that things could work out a little differently in the UK. Frederick, however, is confident that this will not be an issue. "Due to the wide proliferation of broadband internationally, we believe that there is a significant international market for providing a broadband gaming device. The baseline market segment will allow us achieve our business goals, while setting the groundwork for when broadband proliferates further."

With a confirmed price of under $300 and a starting subscription fee of $9.95 a month, it all certainly sounds promising. However, there's still much speculation as to whether any of this is true, particularly from those people who've dug a little deeper into the past of the men behind the console. An article recently posted on www.hardocp.com, for example, makes for some interesting reading. Is it all still just a hoax? Hmm…



PHANTOM SPECS

- **Up to 3.0 GHz processor with 512MB DDR RAM**
- **High-performance NVIDIA graphics card**
- **High-performance Intel motherboard**
- **Dolby Digital 7.1 Surround sound**
- **One wireless controller**
- **Wireless keyboard and mouse**



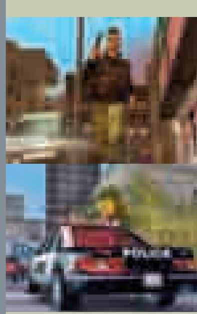
GTA HITS XBOX

GRAND THEFT AUTO SCREECHES ONTO THE BOX

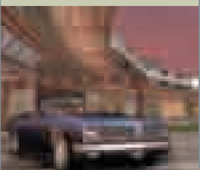
Xbox owners were justifiably excited when Rockstar revealed that its superb *Grand Theft Auto* series would be appearing on Microsoft's machine. Now, after nearly two years of keeping *GTA3* exclusive to Sony's PS2, the wait is over. And perhaps by way of apology for the delay, *Grand Theft Auto* will be released with the acclaimed *Vice City*.

The *GTA* double pack (also available for PS2) will be available from 4 November in the US, but it's highly likely it will appear in the UK by Christmas. Whilst not much information has been revealed, Rockstar Games has confirmed that the Xbox versions will not be straight ports of the PlayStation2 titles, but will instead be enhanced versions of the PC games.

Although Rockstar has announced that *GTA4* will remain a Sony exclusive, Nick Jones, editor of *XBM*, feels that Xbox owners shouldn't be disappointed. "*GTA* on Xbox is important for two reasons. Not only does it represent a chance for Xbox owners to play enhanced versions of the games, but it's also one less reason for people to buy a PS2 this Christmas."



Xbox owners can now go free-roaming at will.



No shoddy PS2 ports here, just, er, PC ports…

GAMECUBE RULES (FOR A WEEK)

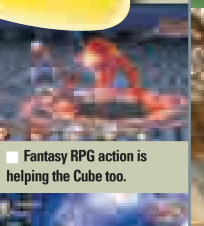
NAMCO'S LATEST RPG HELPS NINTENDO'S CONSOLE TO THE TOP IN JAPAN

With the indomitable stranglehold that the PlayStation2 enjoys in Japan, it's refreshing to see that the GameCube made it the top of the hardware charts, even if it was for just one week. Thanks to the huge success of Namco's *Tales Of Symphonia*, which sold 176,600 copies in its first weekend on sale, some 35,600 GameCubes were shifted.

Although this was only slightly ahead of the PlayStation2's 35,300 units, Nintendo received a further boost thanks to the limited edition Mana Blue GBA SP and Square Enix's much-anticipated handheld title, *Sword Of Mana*. The GBA eventually achieved 40 per cent of the market share and sold 54,700 units.

As far as software goes, *Kirby Air Ride* continues to sell well and has now shifted just over 280,000 units, Square Enix's *Crystal Chronicles* is just short of 300,000 and there were six Nintendo titles in the Dengeki chart as we went to press. With the likes of Natsume's *Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life* already exceeding 73,000 pre-orders in Japan and Factor 5's *Rogue Squadron III* proving popular in the US and UK thanks to its free bonus disc, the future's looking up for Nintendo's 128-bit machine.

Kirby, being a kindly sort of pink blob, is saving the GameCube. How nice.



Fantasy RPG action is helping the Cube too.

GAMES ROOM 101

THE NEGATIVE SIDE OF VIDEOGAMING

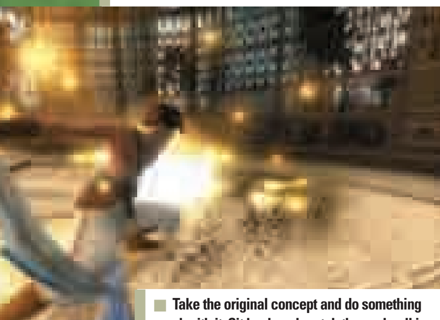
NO.11: A YEAR IS NEVER ENOUGH

Okay, so we'll admit that we're not the biggest fans of sequels (as those of you who read this column regularly will know). But we've begun to realise that much like many other aspects of the games industry we're not so keen on, they're just one of the multitudinous evils we have to put up with, even if we don't like it. What we're now starting to get frustrated with, however, are the number of sequels appearing within a year of the previous game – mainly because in terms of development, a year just isn't enough time to create a game that's different enough to warrant a purchase.

Sure, so perhaps that rule has some exceptions when it comes to genres like sport – after all, how much more is there to do with football? But even so, we hold fast to the belief that a quality sequel with enough improvement over the original to make itself worth £40 can't be turned around in a year. While we appreciate that the games industry is out to make money, and sequels rely on the buying public remembering the original, it's still not enough to expect people to pay out for a quickly knocked-up rehash. Don't people take pride in their work any more?



While EA gets more stick than it probably deserves, there's no denying that it exploits its franchises.



Take the original concept and do something good with it. Sit back and watch the cash roll in.

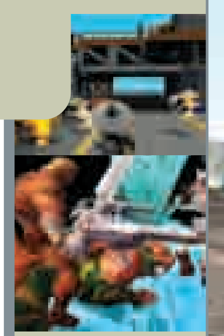


BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



HIGH-RESOLUTION RYU

A new agreement between Capcom and *Guilty Gear* developer Sammy will see a selection of Capcom's characters going head to head with Sammy's own creations in a brand new game called *Sammy Vs. Capcom*. Fans of Capcom's 2D beat-'em-ups have always had to make do with low-resolution character sprites, despite the fact that current technology is more than capable of displaying sharper images. The problem, from Capcom's point of view, is that scanning a new set of high-resolution character animations simply wouldn't be cost-effective. After this deal, however, we can expect something along the lines of *Capcom Vs. SNK*, only nicer looking.



***Masters Of The Universe?* Hell yes.**



THE BILLION DOLLAR CLUB

TAKE 2 LAUNCHES INTO THE BIG LEAGUES

Although rumours had been circulating for some time, it's finally been confirmed that Take 2 Interactive has acquired games publisher TDK Mediactive in a $22.7 million transaction that took place in early September. An important aspect of the move will undoubtedly be the news that the acquisition may help Take 2 break the billion dollar sales barrier in the coming year.

Another noteworthy benefit is the new market that is now accessible to Take 2. Many of its previous games have been aimed at the more mature gamer and TDK's licences such as *Shrek* and *The Muppets* will allow the company to reach a much broader base. "The addition of TDK's mass-market and children's licensed properties to Take 2's properties will complement our portfolio and provide an excellent platform for Take 2 to further expand and diversify its product offerings," said Jeffrey Lapin, CEO of Take 2.

Figures for the financial quarter that ended in July revealed a profit of over $7.7 million for Take 2, much greater than the previous year's $4.8 million. These impressive figures will continue this Christmas thanks to the *GTA* bundle for Xbox and PS2.



MILK THAT PIKACHU

NINTENDO REVEALS ITS FIENDISH PLAN TO UNLOCK RUBY/SAPPHIRE'S EXTRA POKÉMON

Since the release of *Pokémon Ruby* and *Sapphire*, gamers have been wondering how to unlock the remaining hidden Pokémon from the original games. The mystery has now been solved, thanks to a bold move that can be considered either a stroke of genius or a cynical cash-in by Nintendo. It has revealed that *Pokémon Red* and *Blue* will be updated for the Game Boy Advance. Though Nintendo has yet to confirm it, we're expecting these remakes to be fully compatible with the existing GBA titles meaning that you'll have to buy all four GBA games and the forthcoming *Colosseum* for the GameCube if you want to do what the man says and catch 'em all. With the *Pokémon* craze showing no sign of slowing despite being around for the last seven years, this should provide Nintendo with plenty of cash to plough into its next home console.

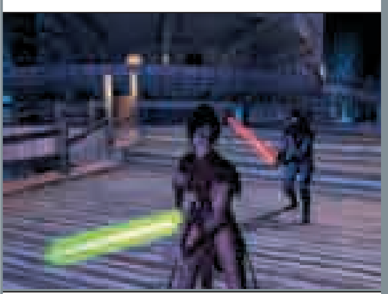


BITE-SIZED STORIES FROM AROUND THE WORLD OF GAMING



JEDI OFFICIALLY RULE

It looks like there's no stopping *Knights Of The Old Republic*. After setting impressive sales figures in the US (over 250,000 units in three days) Bioware's RPG has gone straight to the top of the UK charts. The EyeToy's four-week reign has finally ended and the Xbox now enjoys its third all-format-conquering release (previous titles being *Halo* and *Splinter Cell*). With the delay of *Sudeki* and many other Xbox titles until early 2004, it would seem that *Project Gotham Racing 2* and *KOTOR* are going to be the machine's system sellers. Until *Halo 2* arrives, that is…





Eidos has held on to the brand name but not the code.

Miles Jacobson – taking his ball and going home.

IT'S ALL GONE QUIET OVER THERE

MORE WORRIES FOR EIDOS AS SPORTS INTERACTIVE SAYS GOODBYE

Poor Eidos. After all the problems caused by Core's *Tomb Raider: Angel Of Darkness*, the developers of *Championship Manager* have now also parted company with the beleaguered British publisher. While there has been no official explanation for the split with Sports Interactive, it has been revealed that Eidos has created a new studio that will start working on the *04/05* season update. The publisher was savvy enough to retain the *Championship Manager* brand name, but the actual code and player database will stay with Sports Interactive. What this boils down to is that gamers will find themselves with a very hard decision. Should they stick with a proven game that has constantly delivered (regardless of what name the new game will receive), or will they simply stick with a brand name and hope that Eidos' new studio can deliver?

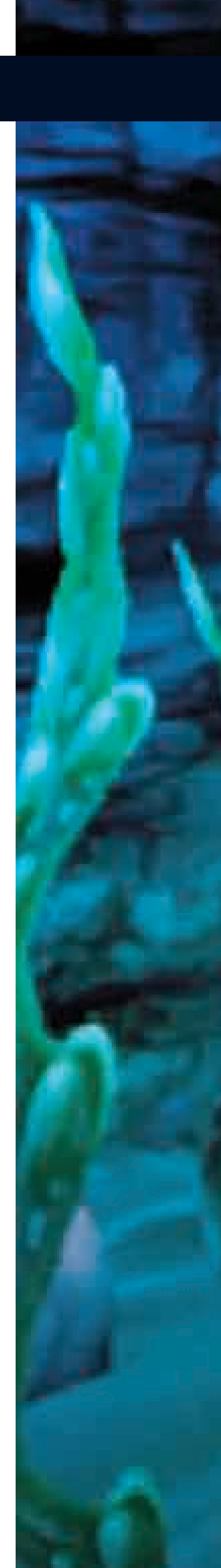
"Well, that's the risk we've taken, isn't it?" said Miles Jacobson, MD of Sports Interactive. "We'll have to ensure that our next title is the best football management game out there, and we'll be working very hard on educating our customers of the changes. The extra competition is likely to drive us on to improve the game even more."

Despite arguably losing its best developer, Eidos is confident that its new studio will be able to follow in Sports Interactive's remarkable footsteps. "Moving the development of *Championship Manager* to our newly-created internal studio will enable us to build upon the phenomenal success of the game and develop the brand further," said Jonathan Kemp, Eidos' European Managing Director.

Ultimately it will be the fans who decide how successful the two games will be. But should they choose to go with Sports Interactive and not the popular brand name, it could be a serious wake-up call for publishers everywhere.

We've teamed up with those fine people at GAME to offer you a £3 discount voucher, thus ensuring your hard-earned cash will stretch just that little bit further. And with Christmas on the way, what better time to start saving a bit of cash here and there?





"WHEN WE FIRST STARTED BG&E, PEOPLE SAID WE WERE CRAZY, THAT THERE WAS JUST TOO MUCH TO IT AND WE SHOULD HAVE STUCK TO JUST ONE GENRE"

MICHEL ANCEL, PRODUCER, UBI SOFT

MICHEL ANCEL

UBI SOFT

You young developers don't know how lucky you are these days. Thanks to such pleasures as the Internet, there's a wealth of information at your fingertips about where to start, but ten years ago, when a young Frenchman was learning to write his own games in his garage, such luxuries weren't available. Not only that, but developers outside Japan and the States didn't have mentors to turn to. "When I was first starting out in the videogames industry," recalls Michel Ancel, the man behind the hugely popular *Rayman* franchise and the upcoming *Beyond Good & Evil*, "there were no experienced development people in Europe like an equivalent of Miyamoto-san to learn from, we were just trying to teach ourselves how to do things. The next generation of developers now have experienced people to learn from, so it makes learning easier."

So does he consider himself one of these experienced people now that he's got a handful of successful games under his belt? "I'm certainly not experienced enough to say that," Ancel says emphatically when asked if his peers consider him the 'French Miyamoto'. But that doesn't rule out the chances of people being able to come to him for advice on games development: "I think that maybe after my next game, it would be worth creating a school where people could come to learn how to be a developer. I'd be very interested in doing that."

Thinking about the future is all very well, but for now there's the small matter of finishing *Beyond Good & Evil* – a game that's been four years in the making and, according to Ancel, "is the title I wanted to do over ten years ago." Considering that many publishers demand a relatively quick turnaround on games, four years for one product seems like a long time. Not that it can't be justified, of course. "We could have released the game about a year ago," admits Ancel, "but it wouldn't have been very high quality. That's when [Ubi Soft] had to choose – you stop the project, you release the product but it's not very good, or you put more money in and see it through to the end. I think we made the right choice. For the consumer it's better, and for Ubi Soft it's an investment. It's not just four years spent on a single game – it's two years developing tools that can be used for numerous projects and then another two on creating the game."

Time issues aside, there's also the concern that Ancel and his team might have bitten off more than they could chew in *BG&E*. The game freely switches between game styles as the player progresses through the adventure, giving it plenty in common with Midway's equally ambitious (but disappointing) *Haven*. The decision to include a specific number of certain game styles and limit yourself from the start doesn't sound like a good idea to us. "We haven't thought like that," insists Ancel. "Instead, we've defined the world and who the lead character is, then built it up around that. Logically, you wouldn't have to go around killing everybody to find out what's going on because Jade [*BG&E*'s heroine] is a journalist and not a warrior. However, she needs to be able to defend herself and so we had to build in certain elements around that. Then she has to get around from place to place, so we include more elements to allow that too, and so on. When you play the game, it's just logical. You don't think you've been playing ten different games in one game, you've been playing one game that offers various gameplay experiences all tied together by the story."

It's this approach that seems to be making *BG&E* a title that covers all the bases successfully, rather than attempting to be 'a game that is all games' and failing miserably as other examples have in the past. This also makes the game a leap forwards from the games of Ancel's past such as *Rayman*. Going from a simplistic, cartoon-based platformer that was spawned from a belief that 2D wasn't dead ("When we did the original *Rayman*, Sony was telling us that it wasn't the right style for the current trend," confides Ancel) to something as ambitious as *BG&E* can't be easy. "It's very hard to create something that's completely original," agrees Ancel. "I don't want to go so far as to say that *BG&E* is revolutionary, but it's definitely unique. I hope that people will take the time to play the game thoroughly and discover everything that it offers. It's all about opening the door for the player and giving them some kind of incentive on the other side that makes them want to step through it."

Beyond Good & Evil is due out on PlayStation2 and PC on 14 November (with Xbox and GameCube versions to follow in 2004) and will be reviewed next issue.



SOME HAVE TRIED AND ALL HAVE FAILED – SO IS IT REALLY POSSIBLE TO CREATE A GAME THAT IS ALL GAMES? THE MAN BEHIND UBI SOFT'S HIGHLY SUCCESSFUL RAYMAN SERIES CERTAINLY SEEMS TO THINK SO…



STATE OF PLAY

WITH THE BUSIEST PART OF THE GAMING CALENDAR JUST AROUND THE CORNER, GAMES™ LOOKS AT THE CURRENT STATE OF THE MARKET

It's been a big year for gamers. Sony has continued to dominate around the globe, the PS2 and Xbox now cater for online play, and *Pokémon* has become another huge success for Nintendo. As Christmas draws closer, videogame retailers are expecting even more impressive sales than those in 2002. While Sony ruled last Christmas, it was surprising that the Xbox and not the GameCube managed to clinch the coveted second place. This year things are not quite as clear cut. Every machine has had games delayed to next year and as a result are without the titles that would have guaranteed a head start over its rivals.

Nintendo, Microsoft and Sony will be spending millions over the coming months to ensure that their console will be the one under everyone's Christmas tree. With each console having at least one triple-A title due out before the end of the year, expensive marketing campaigns are bound to be starting soon. Sony has announced several packages, and you can be sure that Microsoft and Nintendo will provide many choices as Christmas approaches.

TRIED AND TESTED

PLAYSTATION2

- **Predicted retail price:** £129
- **Expected bundles:** *Vice City* and *Pro Evolution 2* pack, *GT4* pack, *EyeToy Play and Groove* pack
- **Must-have games:** *Pro Evolution 3, Gran Turismo 4, Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time*

Thanks to the outstanding success of the EyeToy, Sony's console – which is now approaching sales of over 20 million units in Europe alone – has a strong chance of repeating last year's success. Its network gaming facility is up and running (although it's not perhaps been as well received as Microsoft's service) and the likes of *Gran Turismo 4* and Ubi Soft's *Prince Of Persia* should be more than enough to persuade gamers to part with their hard-earned cash. EyeToy will receive its second title, *Groove*, and there's a strong chance that Konami and Harmonix's *Karaoke Stage* will make the end of the year as well. It's these titles that may well become Sony's trump card over the festive period. Christmas is a time for family get-togethers (albeit occasionally acrimonious ones) and games like *Dancing Stage* and *EyeToy: Play* firmly tap into social gaming in a way that no other multiplayer title has managed. As far as software is concerned, both *FIFA Football 2004* and *Pro Evolution Soccer 3* should do exceptionally well and we wouldn't be surprised to see several of last year's biggest sellers appearing on PS2's Platinum label (thus ensuring quality games at reasonable prices, value fans). It would also appear that the silver PS2 that was released in Japan will make an appearance, although there's been no mention of any of the other limited-edition colours yet. Many might argue that Sony has already got Christmas sewn up and will continue to be an indomitable force for the reminder of its shelf life. While this may well be the case, the Xbox continues to gain respect with gamers and you should never count out Nintendo. Sony, just like its competitors, will have to work extremely hard and can't afford to become complacent.



Still going strong, the PS2 is most likely to dominate at Christmas this year.

XBOX

- **Predicted retail price:** £99
- **Expected bundles:** *Project Gotham Racing 2* pack, *Halo* pack
- **Must-have games:** *Project Gotham Racing 2, Grand Theft Auto* double pack, *Counter-Strike*

Christmas 2002 was arguably a great success for Microsoft's console, thanks to some clever marketing and a certain Sam Fisher. Whether it can repeat this success remains to be seen, as the Xbox, perhaps more than any other machine, has had a number of important titles slip until next year. *Fable*, *Sudeki*, *Ninja Gaiden* and *Kameo: Elements Of Power* are just of few of the big hitters that have now been delayed until the first half of next year, and let's not forget the mighty *Halo 2*. So this leaves Microsoft with Bizarre Creation's very promising *Project Gotham Racing 2*, the double whammy of Rockstar Games' *Grand Theft Auto* double pack and LucasArts' *Knights Of The Old Republic* as its potential Christmas saviours.

With most of the announcements at X03 (Microsoft's trade show) coming too late to make it into this issue, we wouldn't be surprised to hear of an Xbox price point of £99 for Christmas and the continual heavy promotion of Xbox Live. There are already rumours that Live subscription renewals will use a scratch-card service that offers payment over a set number of months. Even if a price cut isn't announced, it's very likely that Microsoft will launch a similar pack to last year's successful SEGA bundle at the standard price. With Xbox Live continuing to draw in the crowds, Microsoft will also be pinning its hopes on the incoming *Counter-Strike*. Regarded as one of the finest online PC games available, *Counter-Strike* is rumoured for an early December release.

OH, IT'S LATE...

DEVELOPMENT IS A TIME-CONSUMING PROCESS SO WE'RE NOT SURPRISED THAT THESE AREN'T ON TIME…



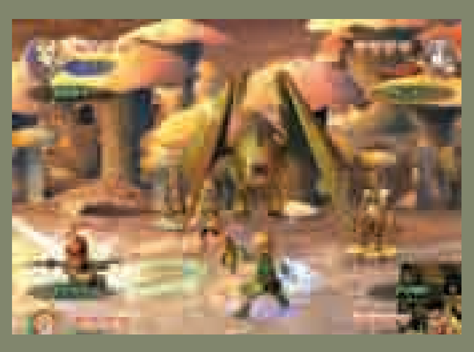
SUDEKI

Microsoft had high hopes for Climax's impressive-looking squad-based RPG. Unfortunately, delays have meant that *Sudeki* is now unlikely to appear until at least March. In a way, though, this is no bad thing as it gives *Knights Of The Old Republic* plenty of room in which to shine.



GRAND TURISMO 4

Don't hold your breath – the following statement from Sony left us a little concerned: "Whenever *GT4* ships it will be awesome. But we haven't specified a release date. Polyphony are perfectionists [and] they are guaranteed not to release it until it is as good as it can be."



FINAL FANTASY: CC

First it was last Christmas, then November, but now *CC* has disappeared completely. Thanks to importing, we're already enjoying the fantastic four-player game. Maybe the reason for the delay is so gamers can save up for three GBAs to play the game the way it was intended…

GAMECUBE

- **Predicted retail price:** £99
- **Expected bundles:** *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* pack, Game Boy Player pack, *Zelda* platinum pack
- **Must-have games:** *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!, F-Zero, Rogue Squadron III*

Nintendo's GameCube is the greatest enigma of the three consoles. While it easily has the most impressive first-party titles, the lack of high-street and developer support is certainly cause for concern. Eidos, Acclaim, Codemasters and THQ have all neglected the GameCube over the past year and some retailers have also given the machine a wide berth. This is particularly distressing as it sends out a negative view to the public, and it also means that delights such as *Viewtiful Joe* and *Harvest Moon* may never achieve the acclaim that they deserve. Quibbles aside, Nintendo has plenty of options to ensure that its machine has a much more successful Christmas than it managed last year. It's quite possible that Nintendo will give the Game Boy Player away for free with the machine. Indeed, with the continuing success of *Pokémon*, this could be an excellent way of getting its 128-bit console into more homes. Loyalty is another aspect and none come more fanatical than the followers of Nintendo. With this in mind, an early release of *Mario Kart: Double Dash!!* and the imminent arrival of *F-Zero GX* should be more than enough to convince those who have yet to discover the joys of Nintendo's console to give it a whirl.

FORGET THE EXCLUSIVES

It's nice to have games for your own machine, but don't forget about the multiformat titles.

TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND

Tony's latest looks set to be every bit as popular as its predecessors. *THUG* is shaping up to be something very special indeed and will hit shelves in November.

SSX 3

Another extreme sports title, but this time EA Canada has seemingly learnt from its past mistakes and is intent on delivering a proper sequel this time around.

XIII

The thought of a cel-shaded shoot-'em-up might not sound like everyone's cup of tea, but trust us, Ubi Soft's incoming *XIII* is looking exceptionally good.

SOUL CALIBUR II

With no other beat-'em-ups on the horizon, Namco's excellent brawler is likely to be on plenty of Christmas lists. Each console boasts its own signature character.

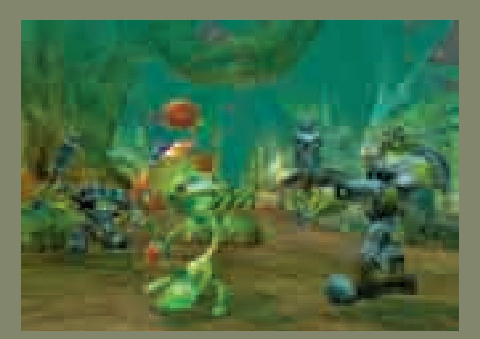
PC

- **Predicted retail price:** £800 – £2,000+
- **Expected bundles:** NA
- **Must-have games:** *Half-Life 2, Max Payne 2, Commandos 3: Destination Berlin*

Developers are currently working around the clock to ensure that a batch of triple-A titles that will showcase some of the most spectacular graphics ever seen in videogames will be out in time for Christmas. But whether or not the likes of *Doom III*, *Half-Life 2* and *Deus Ex: Invisible War* will actually arrive in time to fill our undoubtedly overflowing stockings this December may be irrelevant unless you've got the hardware needed to run the things at anything like a respectable frame rate. We're clearly entering a new era in terms of the graphical splendour that forthcoming PC titles are capable of delivering, and unless you've bought a new machine in the last five minutes chances are you'll struggle to keep pace with cutting-edge gaming in 2004.

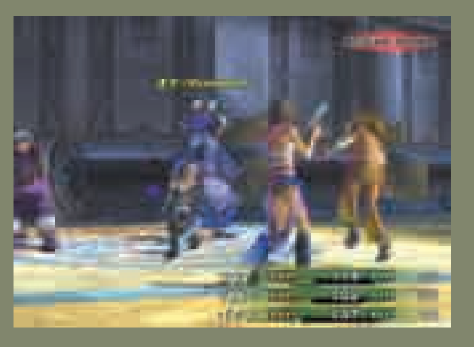
There aren't enough 'oo's in smooth to describe how fluidly a £2,500 Area-51 Extreme from Alienware would run anything game developers could throw at it, but this may prove a rather tall order for your average Santa. Those of us with anything resembling a half-decent PC already, however, might be only a couple of hundred megs of RAM and a GeForce FX graphics card short of enjoying this next generation of games in their full glory. And with the visual quality of PC gaming already far exceeding its console brethren, this £200 investment in upgrades may well prove the most popular option for filling the two-year void until the next generation of consoles can begin to level the playing field.

MORE STRAGGLERS YET MORE QUALITY TITLES THAT HAVE MISSED THE RELEASE-DATE BUS…



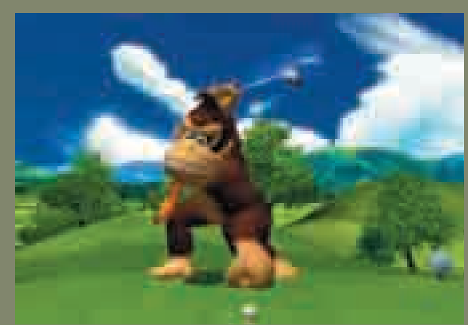
KAMEO: ELEMENTS OF POWER

Despite being trumpeted as Rare's first title for the Xbox, *Kameo: Elements Of Power* is yet another title that has disappeared off the Christmas release lists. Now scheduled for the beginning of June, Rare and Microsoft's hopes will lie with *Grabbed By The Ghoulies*.



FINAL FANTASY X2

With the American version of Square Enix's first true *Final Fantasy* sequel not even on the shelves yet, the chances of this making its predicted December release are incredibly slim. RPGs are notoriously difficult to translate for the European market.



MARIO GOLF: TOADSTOOL TOUR

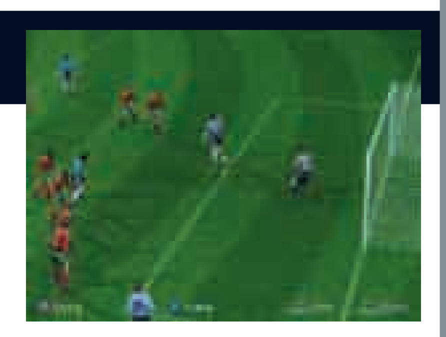
Mario was down for a fourth-quarter release for ages, but now the only chance you'll get to enjoy it is if you import the game. Considered by many to be an accomplished title, *Mario Golf* is a perfect example of Nintendo's indifference towards the European market.

THE **DECISION** IS YOURS

TIME TO SEND THOSE LISTS TO SANTA AND HOPE YOUR GRANNY DOESN'T BUY YOU A GAME

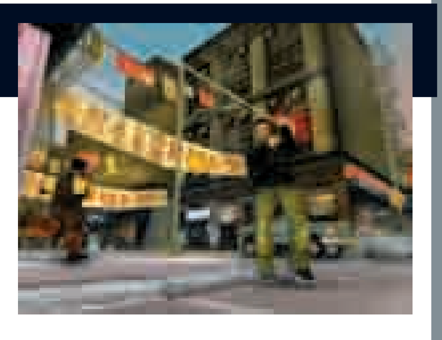
You've been extremely good all year, have eaten your greens, kept your room tidy and not frittered away the year's savings. With this in mind your spouse, partner or doting parent is now letting you buy a couple of spanking new games for your new machine. These are the games you simply can't be without on Christmas morning.

PLAYSTATION2
PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 3 £39.99



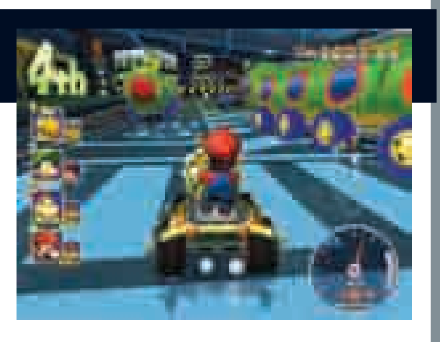
The new benchmark for sports titles, the *Pro Evolution* series is a bitter pill to swallow for the PS2-less public. Sony's ability to retain the quintessential simulation of the beautiful game will serve it well this Christmas. More than just the cynical annual update, *Pro Evo 3* genuinely evolves the series as the name would suggest, offering a gaming experience streets ahead of its closest rivals. EA's *FIFA?* Eat my goal. Worth buying a PlayStation2 for? You bet your Arsenal it is…

XBOX
GRAND THEFT AUTO £39.99



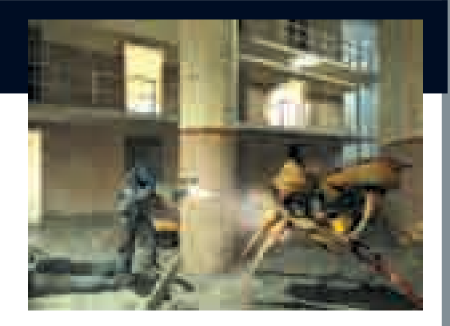
Okay, so it's technically two games, but the *GTA* and *Vice City* pack is an essential purchase for Xbox fans everywhere. Extremely popular on the PlayStation2, the *Grand Theft Auto* games allow you to roam freely around a sprawling metropolis to your heart's content. There are plenty of missions and extras spread across both titles to ensure that you'll be playing this well into the New Year, but it's the 'go anywhere, play anywhere' aspect of the series that makes it so enjoyable.

GAMECUBE
MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!! £39.99



So what if Nintendo has been rather tardy with recent PAL conversions? If there was one title that was ever a system seller it's Mario's latest *Kart* outing, and Nintendo would be crazy if this fails to make the holiday season. The finished code at ECTS demonstrated that the title has come along considerably since its first appearance at E3. The addition of a second person on each Kart significantly adds to the game's strategy, though the tracks are not as tight as those seen in the SNES classic.

PC
HALF-LIFE 2 £39.99



With ID's *Doom III* extremely unlikely to appear by the time Santa turns up, Valve's extraordinarily good *Half-Life 2* will be given plenty of space to shine. Astonishing visuals, superlative physics and an established pedigree will be more than enough to convince PC owners that *Half-Life 2* will be the king of first-person shooters. With three different versions of the game set to be available and the subscription rates decided, the further adventures of Gordon Freeman are becoming a reality.

BUDGET SMUDGET

Want to make those pennies stretch a little bit further? Then your best bet is to take a look through the budget titles that will be littering the festive shelves.

PLAYSTATION2

- **Sony's Platinum range continues to grow and now contains a staggering amount of top titles. With the huge user base that Sony now enjoys, it seems like those games are turning Platinum quicker than ever.**
- *The Getaway*
- *Kingdom Hearts*
- *Hitman 2: Silent Assassin*
- *Splinter Cell*
- *Ratchet & Clank*

XBOX

- **Despite only being established in June, Microsoft's Classics range is already making a name for itself and features some great games.**
- *Hunter: The Reckoning*
- *Medal Of Honor: Frontline*
- *James Bond 007: Nightfire*
- *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4*
- *Conflict: Desert Storm*

GAMECUBE

- **Always slow to follow its competitors, the Nintendo budget range doesn't look much different to when it first appeared. While Americans enjoy the likes of *Resident Evil Zero, Animal Crossing* and *Metroid Prime* at cut prices, the PAL market is a different story.**
- *Super Smash Bros Melee*
- *Pikmin*
- *Luigi's Mansion*
- *Harry Potter And The Chamber Of Secrets*

PC

- **Where do you begin? The PC has an enormous range of games, many of which can be bought for as little as £5. Of course, with older and cheaper games, there's a greater likelihood that you'll be able to play them on slower machines. Here are just a few essentials.**
- *Half-Life*
- *Deus Ex*
- *Torment*
- *Aliens Vs Predator 2*

games™ USA REPORT

LETTER FROM AMERICA

WITH YOUR FRIENDLY EX-PATRIOT, THE SHAPE

"ALL THE MAJOR CONSOLE MANUFACTURERS NEED TO DO IS SETTLE ON HIT THE AIRWAVES AND THE RELENTLESS MACHINERY

I've got it! Maybe it's the emerging tip of rising genius. Maybe it's the psychoactive additives in all those nutritious meal-in-a-box-for-lonely-people dinners I eat when Mrs Shape is out of the country, as she is now. Maybe it's a lack of cerebral oxygen from watching three hours of Home & Garden TV while lying upside down on the sofa (which also only seems to occur during prolonged abandonment by my significant other). Whatever the cause, the cogs turned, the mind worked, the spirit contemplated, perhaps like no-one else's ever had before, and then, with the brassy 'ding!' of a receptionist's bell, came the answer: slogans. Stick with me.

You're wondering what the question was. Truth be told, so was I, but I think it was possibly the old 'How do we get gaming accepted as mainstream media?' quandary. And there it is. US business is fuelled by slogans. A brand name doesn't carry enough information on its own – it's not until some carefully selected phrase follows that the brand is defined. All the major console manufacturers need do is settle on their own permanent mottoes, hit the airwaves and the relentless machinery of consumerism will do the rest. They work, too. Trust me – my head is full of them.

I don't have to rifle through a crumpled stack of notes to quote any number of lines that have been hammered into my skull. At the darker end of the spectrum we have the sinister 'Clearchannel Radio: We're Everywhere' (with a 1,600-station monopoly, they really are) or 'Hamden Memorial Funeral Home: Don't Drink And Drive, We'll Wait'. I've even noticed a pawn shop in the armpit of town, billing itself as 'The Bank of the 21st Century' – truthful, I'm sure, but depressing enough to induce a sigh in all who pass the sign.

My favourite (and by far the most American) of these is for GMC, or General Motors Corp. Having shown you an enormous vehicle plunging into ravines, scaling frozen mountains and devouring hostile landscape with supertruck-sized tyres – a vehicle of such girth and power that you could transport the entire Dallas Cowboys cheerleading squad through Mogadishu's least appealing resorts in oblivious luxury – comes this: 'It's not more than you need, just more than you're used to.' Bravo! Let's adapt that for our American console, the Xbox: 'It's not too big – just bigger than the others.'

At this point, I should make it clear that I am aware these games giants dabble with mottoes from time to time, but they never stick with them and the terms differ from country to country. This isn't the way to build your brand for the masses. It takes years. EA Sports has got the right idea: 'It's in the game'. I'm not absolutely clear on what this means but they've hung

Cheerleaders looking a bit ropey since *Saved By The Bell*.

THEIR OWN PERMANENT MOTTOES, OF CONSUMERISM WILL DO THE REST"

onto it so long, it's caught on. You find people who don't own a single videogame will still know 'it's in the game', in the same way that I'm in no way smitten by the homemaking luxuries sold at reasonable prices by JC Penny's department stores, even though I am aware that 'it's all inside'. It's like water on stone, eventually making an indelible mark.

But what would suit Sony or Nintendo? The trouble is, in the age of the trademark all the best slogans are taken. Millions of companies are badging billions of products all the time. Just search the US Patent & Trademark Office's database online. You almost have to resort to random gibberish to hit upon a phrase that isn't spoken for. 'GameCube: It's Pancake Dilemma Chipmunk', in my view at least, isn't likely to sell much hardware nor weave its way into the tapestry of popular language, but at least it's available should Nintendo feel differently. This, of course, highlights the importance of choosing lifelong trademarks sooner rather than later as more terms are snatched from the public domain each day.

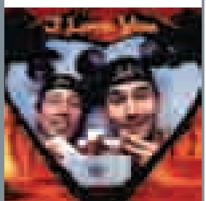
Ah! Here we are: 'PlayStation2: Never Mind The Jaggies!' Oh dear. I've just realised, as you may have, that maybe I'm not so good at this. What can I say? Genius can only stretch so far. Ad executives and brand consultants can take it from here, I'm going back to the sofa.

Many thanks



MISS ABOUT BRITAIN…

Adam & Joe



LOVE ABOUT AMERICA…

Avoiding HM Customs



WANT ANY QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY THE SHAPE? THEN DROP HIM A LINE AT: theshape@comcast.net HE MIGHT LISTEN, IF YOU'RE LUCKY

AMERIKAAN

PRODUCTS, PLACES, SERVICES AND EVENTS FROM THE LAND OF THE FREE

PIG IN A BLANKET

Can you believe that this is the horrifying name for a simple sausage roll out here? It makes you feel like a right monster, as though you're gobbling an entire piglet right out of its little bed.



US MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	NCAA Football 2004	EA Sports	Multi
2	Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	Xbox
3	Dragon Ball Z: Legacy Of Goku II	Atari	GBA
4	Donkey Kong Country	Nintendo	GBA
5	Pokémon Ruby/Sapphire	Nintendo	GBA
6	Yu-Gi-Oh! Worldwide Edition	Konami	GBA
7	GTA: Vice City	Rockstar	PS2
8	NBA Street Vol. 2	EA Sports BIG	Multi
9	Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour	Nintendo	GC
10	Enter The Matrix	Atari	Multi

(Updated 16/09/03)



NCAA Football

Knights Of The Old Republic



KONGETSU*

WITH JAPANESE CORRESPONDENT OLLIE BARDER

“MANY OF THOSE GAMERS WHO JUST PLAY GAMES TO EARN LIFESTYLE BADGE MAY WISH THE ACTIVITY WAS MORE CHIC, BUT IT'S

This time, I've got the sucker nailed. He's hiding behind one of those damn buildings but, thankfully, the lock-on system is clearly displaying his cowardly behaviour. I signal to my wingman to give me some cover before I close in for the kill. Unfortunately, my wingman is an utter tool and he lets my opponent's wingman through. What follows can only be described as a 'mecha mosh pit with a topping of extra thick plasma'. Bugger. Be aware that the above almost makes *Virtual On Force* sound good – in reality though, it's average gaming done for mecha fans who don't have anything else better to do (like me, basically). This isn't to say that the *Virtual On* franchise hasn't produced a few gaming corkers – with the original being probably one of the finest games ever made – but, in all honesty, *Force* ain't that great.

At this point, I don't doubt that many of you are already complaining about that damn Barder man, talking about big robots again. Well, yes I am, but there's a reason for this. By the time you read this, I will be back in Blighty. This means that, unfortunately, this is my final Kongetsu column. Also, this means that those of you who have become transfixed with my poor use of the splendid English language will have to get your questionably erotic fixes somewhere else. My detractors will naturally rejoice at this but, for my fans, this may come as truly soul-crushing news.

I have had a very good two years in Japan, though, and they will be remembered fondly for many years to come. Japan is by no means a faultless country but it has been my home and that's the sort of thing a person gets attached to after a while. You see, anime brought me to Japan, but it was Japan that made me a gamer. This isn't to say that I wasn't an avid fan of gaming beforehand, but it was Japan that truly broke me. Much like a fascistic schoolmistress with a fetish for excessive spanking, I was very much owned by Japan. This caused all sorts of problems with my much-cherished personal objectivity – after all, every bloody games store sold four million mecha games. For my first few months I was a non-sensical, deranged otaku (and some would argue this has yet to truly change) but after a while, things chilled and I started to regress to my older and truer roots of gaming taste. This hasn't stopped me from blathering on about mecha gaming to all and sundry, but at least now I'm actually talking from the perspective of someone who plays games rather than some nut who just obsesses over mecha anime. Now I obsess about both.

Yet for all my personal eccentricities, I still remain glad for the games industry. The industry and its market are developing into something innate and almost tangible. Admittedly, many a PR hand will try to convince you that the revolution is now, but I have more faith in the general public not to believe such

■ Warning: may contain small parts, and peanut traces.



YET ANOTHER SUB-CULTURE NOT A GLAMOROUS PASTIME"

insidious bullshit. Many of the more vapid gamers, as in those who do gaming to earn yet another sub-culture lifestyle badge, may wish it was more chic but gaming is not a glamorous pastime. Selling it as such is just another drop in the well of cognitive dissonance.

Admittedly, gaming will enter further into the mainstream (this is all but unavoidable) but it will never be an entity of social desirability. You see, after my two years in Japan I have realised that the Japanese are not interested in how cool games can be socially, just how cool the games themselves actually are. There aren't the huge misleading song-and-dance campaigns from the media in Japan – unlike the ones we're subjected to here, they just show the games. Of all the things the Western games industry should learn from these genki Nihonjin it is their no-nonsense attitude towards games. Will it ever happen? Perhaps. But then I won't be here to witness it. Think fond thoughts of me, though, as I battle through *R-Type* (on MAME) at 30,000 feet whilst fondling the pert buttocks of some nubile Japanese air hostess. 'Tis a hard life, after all.

Kind regards



TEACH YOURSELF JAPANESE

LESSON TEN: JAPANESE PLANE ETIQUETTE

How do you open this door?	Kono doa douyatte akerundesuka?
Oh, I can't because it would depressurise the cabin.	Aa korene, konodoawa akeremasenyo – aketara kyabin no kiatsugasagarimasukara.
No, I am not a terrorist.	Iie. Watashiwa terorisutojya.
So can I open the door?	Jya, konodoaaketemoiidesuka?
Dangerous? No my dear, dangeresque!	Abunaidesutte? Chigaimasuyo, danjeresuku!


Ollie's coming home, he's coming home, he's coming…

JAL JALWAYS

JALWAYS AND FOREVER

Flying to Japan is pretty much the only way to get there, unless you're a nutter and try to swim. This means that you shall have to endure the countless multifaceted wonders of many a global airline. I have flown them all to Japan. Most suck. Japan Airlines, however, rocks. My final flight home is on a Japan Airlines (or JAL, to the more experienced air traveller) route. It's comfortable with a range of food that's actually edible. The air hostesses are also rather scrumptious, and there's the added bonus of not having to fear for one's life as the plane is unlikely to fall apart from the inside. The catch? JAL is super pricey, but if you want to get to Japan and not feel like utter crap by the end of the flight, fly JAL. Their in-flight games aren't that bad either.



JAPANESE MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Tales Of Symphonia	Namco	GC
2	Sword Of Mana	Square Enix	GBA
3	Winning Eleven 7	Konami	PS2
4	Winning Post 6	Koei	PS2
5	Pokémon Pinball: Ruby/Sapphire	Nintendo	GBA
6	Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles	Nintendo	GC
7	Kirby's Air Ride	Nintendo	GC
8	Monster Farm 4	Tecmo	PS2
9	Jikkyou Powerful Pro Baseball 10	Konami	PS2
10	Super Mario Advance 4	Nintendo	GBA

(Dengeki Console Game Ranking Top 50, week ending 05/09/03)


Tales Of Symphonia
Sword Of Mana
Winning Eleven 7



FROM THE SIMPLE IDEA OF CREATING EASY-TO-MANAGE DEVELOPMENT SOFTWARE TO BECOMING THE BACKBONE OF WELL OVER HALF THE GAMES COMING OUT TODAY – THAT'S THE RENDERWARE WAY…



"EXPERIMENTATION AND INNOVATION ARE BOTH RISKY ENDEAVOURS, SO THE QUEST FOR A STAND-OUT GAME THESE DAYS DOESN'T COME WITHOUT RISK"

DAVID LAU-KEE, CEO, CRITERION SOFTWARE

DAVID LAU-KEE

CRITERION SOFTWARE

Even though some of you won't remember, it's fair to say that a decade ago the games industry was a somewhat different animal. Two-dimensional titles ruled, games still came on cartridges and Sony wasn't even on the radar as a threat to the likes of SEGA and Nintendo. That's why we reckon if you'd suggested to the people who were busy founding Criterion Software back in 1993 that they would go on to develop a range of tools that would be used to create a ton of games in not just the UK, but Japan and the US as well, you'd have been laughed out the building. Nevertheless, that's exactly what happened and, not surprisingly, the company hasn't looked back since.

"The game industry really is a global activity these days," says David Lau-Kee, CEO of Criterion Software, the firm responsible for the RenderWare revolution. "There are hundreds of RenderWare games out there now, and hundreds more currently in development."

Although seeing its software being used by a company as influential as SEGA must have come as quite a surprise, we can't help but raise an eyebrow at the claim that the company didn't forsee how big RenderWare was going to become. However, with the games industry now more profit-driven than ever before, it's not a shock to learn that having a 'share and share alike' attitude was the first thing on Criterion's mind.

"Keeping RenderWare for ourselves was never the intention," insists Lau-Kee. "It's been designed from the ground up as a set of extensible components and tools explicitly for others to use. I honestly believe that great games aren't about cool technology – the real value is in compelling game design, great gameplay, artwork, characters and so on. Everyone knows just how much games have advanced over the past few years and a key factor in that is putting powerful tools into the hands of the experts who can handle the rest."

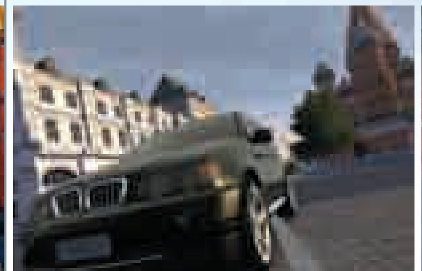
Those of us with a passion for the subject might suggest that it's 'the rest' that's really becoming the important part of games today, with progress starting to slow in the field of graphical development. "It used to be the case that great graphics would get you a long way to differentiating your game, but that's not the case any longer," says Lau-Kee. "Experimentation with artistic or graphical style will, of course, continue to differentiate games, as will innovation. Unfortunately, experimentation and innovation are both risky endeavours, so the quest for a stand-out game these days doesn't come without risk."

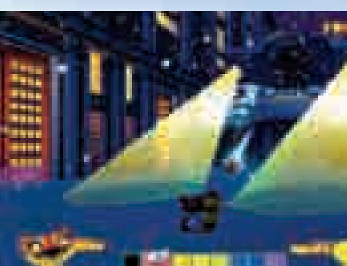
Going on the fact that RenderWare is mere inches from becoming the industry standard, many would believe that this is where its strengths lie – enabling developers to manage the risk of new (and sometimes unproven) innovations by minimising the technology and integration risks involved, giving people the creative freedom to take their games in whichever direction makes sense. "It's easy for people to look at what we've done and conclude that RenderWare is an extremely potent force in development," admits Lau-Kee. "The sheer complexity and scale of game development means that tools and middleware are not a force for change, but rather a solution to a set of fundamental creative and business requirements. Essentially, people wanted to catch mice and so we made a clean, effective mousetrap that works. Obviously, you don't absolutely need a mousetrap – a chunk of cheese and a hammer would probably do the business – but I know which method I'd choose."

It's an odd analogy, but we can certainly see what Lau-Kee's getting at, especially since we can think of more than a few games that look like they've been developed in a 'cheese and hammer' way. But with two more games already in development (currently codenamed *Black* and *Dust Storm*), it looks as though that's an accusation Criterion isn't going to face anytime soon. In fact, the company's possibly in the best possible position to read the ups and downs of an industry that Lau-Kee himself agrees is fraught with turmoil. "With the company being split into two – the middleware part of the business and Criterion Games – we're lucky enough to have quite a wide perspective on what's going on in the industry at the moment. It's great to be in the middle of things where there's so much going on with games right now. I can't think of anywhere else I'd rather be, except maybe on the receiving end of those *GTA: Vice City* royalty cheques."

COMMUNITY

THIS MONTH, **games™** GOES 'OOP NORTH' TO LIVERPOOL TO VISIT BIZARRE CREATIONS, HOME OF PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2





BIZARRE CREATIONS

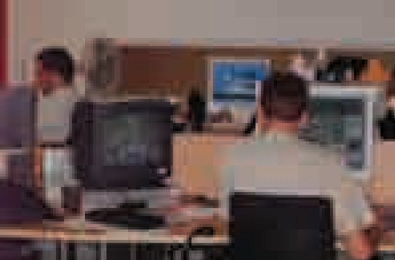
IF IT'S A HIGH-CLASS MIX OF RACING ACTION AND YOUNG TALENT YOU'RE AFTER, THERE'S NO NEED TO LOOK TO JAPAN OR AMERICA – EVERYTHING YOU COULD NEED IS WAITING FOR YOU IN LIVERPOOL. JUST REMEMBER TO HANG ON TO YOUR HUBCAPS…

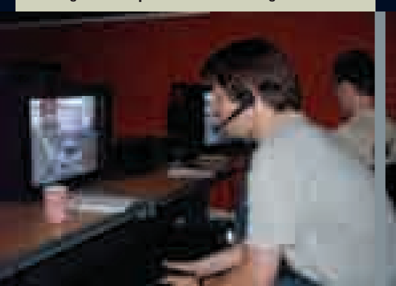
As many of you who fondly recall the eras of the Spectrum, Commodore 64, Amstrad and countless other computer-cum-games machines will remember, the realm of games development was once a very different one compared to the business-driven animal of today. Back then, virtually anyone could become a successful programmer and have games sold at their local Woolworths. All it took was a fair bit of coding knowledge, a pack of blank tapes and a friendly word in the ear of the manager. Of course, not everyone who could string together a few lines of code had the calibre to make it as a respected member of the industry. Only the ones who stuck at it and scored a little bit of luck ended up making it beyond the bedroom door. "I started coding purely for fun when at secondary school," reminisces Martyn Chudley, the man responsible for turning a bedroom-based programming set-up into the firm that is now know as Bizarre Creations.

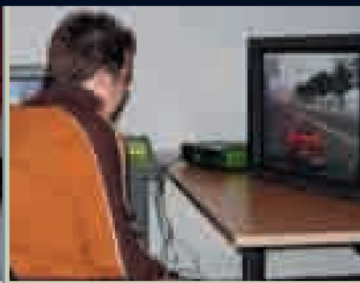
"Computers were the 'in thing' there and whilst never being particularly good at coding, I always enjoyed the creative aspect of it. Games were just a natural progression, I guess. Even though I was a lone coder,

Having just moved offices because of increased team size, Bizarre Creations is now officially one of the largest developers in the north of England.









The *Gotham* team makes up just a small part of the whole company. Bizarre Creations currently has three teams working under its roof.

though, I never really felt alone as I always felt that I had the full support of Psygnosis in those early days. It was just fun – no worrying about the future or anything, just making games. It wasn't until the reality hit of needing more people to make games that Bizarre basically got started." As additional opportunities for work came along more people was exactly what Raising Hell Software (Chudley's original company) needed, and upon taking on its first three staff members, Bizarre Creations was born. Occurring at a time that could only be termed as a defining moment for the games industry – thanks to the appearance of the PSone – it was a pivotal moment for the company and one that put it onto the path towards bigger and better things.

However, it only takes one brief glance at the titles that Bizarre has produced to notice a rather distinct pattern forming since 1996. One or two deviations aside, the lion's share of titles created by the Liverpool-based developer have all fallen neatly into the category of racing games. This in itself isn't exactly a bad thing – after all, some companies have been sticking to what they're good at for years and it certainly doesn't appear to have done them any harm. Still, you can't help but think that an up-and-coming developer like Bizarre wouldn't want to pigeonhole itself too early and end up doing the same old thing year after year. A view shared by the company itself.

"We definitely feel that one of our key strengths is in the racing genre, but we're not dismissive of other genres," admits Brian Woodhouse, executive producer at Bizarre Creations. "One school of thought would advise not to limit our options and another would have us focus on where our traditional successes have been. We feel as though our recent non-racing titles like *Fur Fighters* and *Treasure Planet* have done well, and although they don't match commercially some of the numbers generated in other areas, we feel that they are successes. It all depends how you want to benchmark success, I suppose." Unfortunately, measuring success is also something that's changed greatly since the days of the bedroom programmer. Whereas word of mouth and a good response from your peers was more than enough for the lone coder, all big businesses are interested in are lots of numbers with a pound sign on the front. In an industry where third-party developers can go from being the talk of the town to floundering in receivership almost overnight, resting on your laurels is something no developer should ever do.

"BY REMAINING STOUTLY INDEPENDENT, WE'VE ENSURED THAT WE CAN PUT OUR 'EGGS' INTO A RANGE OF BASKETS"

MARTYN CHUDLEY, BIZARRE CREATIONS



WAY BACK WHEN

They say that great oaks grow from tiny acorns and in the case of Bizarre Creations, that couldn't be truer. Single-handed 'bedroom' programming is a thing of the past, but the company wouldn't be where it is today without it…

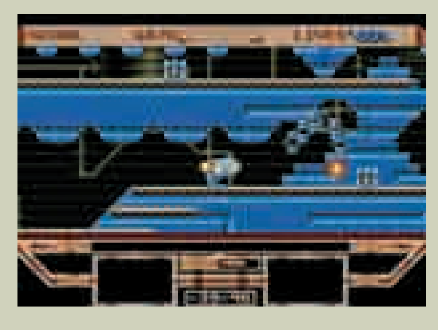
COMBAT CRAZY
(COMMODORE 64, 1988)

The first game in the history of Bizarre Creations, even though it was written by just one person – Martyn Chudley, future MD of the company. Being an example of bedroom programming, the gameplay was rather shallow but it was still fun.



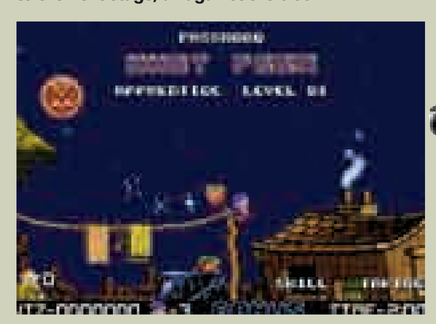
THE KILLING GAME SHOW
(AMIGA/ATARI ST 1990, MEGA DRIVE 1991)

Beginning life as a demo programme called *Robodragon, TKGS* came into being once Psygnosis commissioned it to be made into a full game. However, virtually all the art and coding was still done by Martyn Chudley on his own.

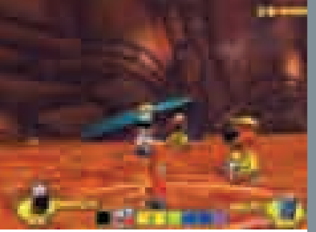


WIZ N' LIZ
(AMIGA/MEGA DRIVE 1993)

A more child-friendly game compared to previous titles, *Wiz N' Liz* was also released by Psygnosis and saw you control one of two wizards in an effort to release 'wabbits' before opening the door to the next stage, all against the clock.







Fur Fighters first hit the Dreamcast before being picked up for the PS2 by Acclaim.



"TO BE HONEST, WE'RE IN A FAIRLY ROBUST POSITION RIGHT NOW"

BRIAN WOODHOUSE, BIZARRE CREATIONS

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

It might be common knowledge that the big title on the horizon for Bizarre Creations is *Project Gotham Racing 2*, but one concern is the announcement that the game will only run at 30fps, against the 60fps rate of the original. It's a fact that many fans have questioned, even though the reasons behind it are more than justified. "It was probably one of the hardest we've had to make during the lifetime of the project," admits Woodhouse. "We wanted to really up the bar on the graphical side of the game over the first game, so this time round we've been able to enable anti-aliasing to smooth off those jagged edges and put a lot more detail into the buildings around the circuits, giving them a lot more depth and realism. We've also upped the number of cars in street races from six to eight – it just made more sense to lock the game to a constant 30fps considering the level of content."



Thankfully, that's a problem Bizarre doesn't have to deal with. "To be honest, we're in a fairly robust position right now," says Woodhouse. "The nature of the company isn't to be the biggest or the richest, and we believe that our success has been a by-product of this philosophy. We're essentially here to make the best games we can and we seem to be doing okay on that front, so naturally we expect a level of success to follow. Of course, one of the pillars of the company is that we are only as good as our latest game and this seems to be mirrored throughout the industry, where we've seen good companies fold quickly and dramatically. So, whilst being cautiously optimistic, we're also very keen not to take our eye off the ball."

Exercising caution may be a wise move in this industry, but sometimes developers have little choice in the matter – particularly when one of the biggest Japanese games companies around (at the time) comes knocking at your door. When SEGA came to Bizarre with the proposition of developing a genre-defining racing game for its new

RED EYES

Comedy Scouse perms and taches absent, thankfully…

1 **MARTYN CHUDLEY** – MD, Bizarre Creations
Previously: Wrote games independently before being commissioned to work for Psygnosis.

2 **BRIAN WOODHOUSE** – Executive Producer, Bizarre Creations
Previously: Worked for Sony and has been a producer for the last five years.

01

02



The attention to detail in *PGR2* has cost many man hours. But it's worth it.



Treasure Planet might not have been the most innovative title, but it still sold quite well.

Dreamcast console, it was an offer that it couldn't refuse – even if *Metropolis Street Racer* did end up being one of the most delayed games for the machine. "Being chosen by SEGA was very important to us," says Chudley, "as it felt that we had been 'accepted' in the world of games creation. Granted, the *F1* series was successful, but being approached by SEGA to create a racing game showed we had reached a new level. It was a real shame that the hardware wasn't a success – it was a great bit of kit to work with – but it did give us a bit of a starting point with Microsoft when developing *Project Gotham Racing* from its 'parent', *Metropolis Street Racer*. In some ways, it was a shame that SEGA took the decision to go cross-platform so late, just clinging on to Dreamcast for a touch too long. If they had decided to move to PS2 and GameCube sooner then *MSR* may have been on everything. It's strange how the cards fall sometimes, but obviously with our great relationship with Microsoft and the acceptance of *PGR* as an established franchise, things have turned out pretty good."

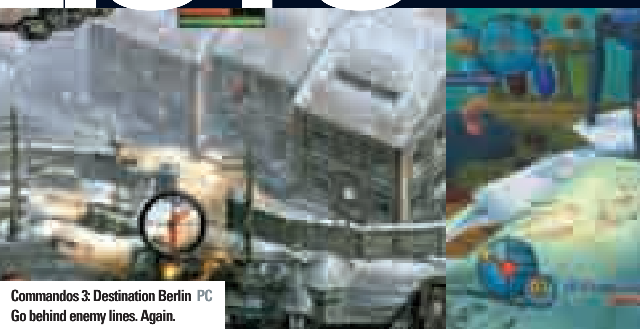
Indeed, they have – having gone from small-time developer to SEGA's 'developer of choice' and finally to one of the key third-party firms under the considerably expansive wing of Microsoft, Bizarre Creations looks to be in a prime spot for the future. Having just relocated to a bigger premises due to the *PGR2* team growing too big as the title draws closer to completion, and with two teams already hard at work on other projects (currently codenamed *Nightmare* and *Smokescreen*), there's little doubt that the company is already looking further ahead than most other developers at the moment. While this could be attributed in part to the involvement of good ol' Bill, the people in charge at Bizarre have more than enough sense to let that go to their heads.

"I think we've made progress massively thanks to the 'structured' approach of Microsoft while completely retaining the ability to constantly innovate," says Chudley. "Microsoft strongly believes in always giving the consumers something new and fresh, and with the changes we've made in *PGR2* I don't think we'll disappoint. However, the 'small company' atmosphere of the company has remained, which is great to see and very much part of our company philosophy." And if that means great games, long may it continue, we say.

RELEASE LISTS


Project Gotham Racing 2 Xbox
The king of Xbox racers returns.


Killer 7 GC
More cel-shaded action from Capcom? Yes, please.


Commandos 3: Destination Berlin PC
Go behind enemy lines. Again.

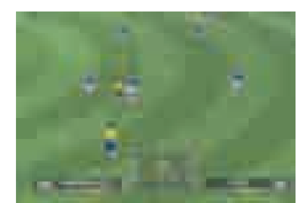


MOST PLAYED

WINNING ELEVEN 7

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Konami

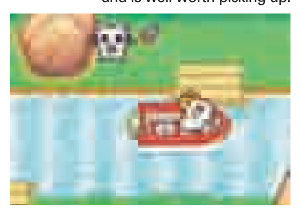
We're not quite sure how Konami manages to continually improve probably the greatest football game of all time, but we're certainly not complaining. New tricks, improved dribbling and the excellent Advantage option are just a few of the treats to expect when the PAL version arrives, but for now we're very happy to play in Japanese.



HAMTARO: HAM-HAM HEARTBREAK

Format: Game Boy Advance
Publisher: Nintendo

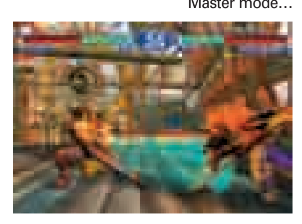
It's not every day that you get to save the world from a hamster in a devil suit. And we're suckers for cute, quirky titles, so the popularity of Hamtaro's latest adventure was pretty much a given. This hamster-heavy RPG pushes all the right buttons and is well worth picking up.

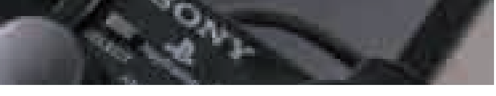


SOUL CALIBUR II

Format: Multi
Publisher: EA/Nintendo

Okay, so the UK version may not have knocked our socks off, but there's no denying that the Soul still burns in Namco's classy battler. There are certain benefits with the PAL release though – for starters we can now at least understand everything in Weapon Master mode…





PLAYSTATION2

Month	Title	Publisher	
OCTOBER			
10 October	Breath Of Fire: Dragon Quarter	Capcom	
10 October	Evolution Snowcross	Konami	
10 October	Freaky Flyers	Midway	
17 October	Backyard Wrestling: Don't Try This At Home	Eidos	
17 October	Megaman X7	Capcom	
24 October	Buffy The Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds	Vivendi	
24 October	SSX 3	Electronic Arts	
31 October	Fallout: Brotherhood Of Steel	Vivendi	Wanted
31 October	FIFA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	
31 October	Gladiator: Sword Of Vengeance	Acclaim	
31 October	Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	Wanted
31 October	Worms 3D	SEGA	
31 October	XIII	Ubi Soft	Wanted
TBC	Falcone: Into The Maelstrom	Virgin	
TBC	Gladius	LucasArts	
TBC	NBA 2K4	SEGA	
TBC	NFL 2K4	SEGA	
TBC	Pop Idol	Codemasters	
TBC	Time Crisis 3	SCEE	
TBC	Zone Of The Enders: The 2nd Runner	Konami	
NOVEMBER			
07 November	Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts	
07 November	LOTR: The Return Of The King	Electronic Arts	
07 November	True Crime: Streets Of L.A.	Activision	Wanted
14 November	Beyond Good & Evil	Ubi Soft	Wanted
14 November	Legacy Of Kain: Defiance	Eidos	
14 November	Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time	Ubi Soft	Wanted
14 November	Tony Hawk Underground	Activision	Wanted
21 November	Batman: The Rise Of Sin Tzu	Ubi Soft	
21 November	Crash Nitro Kart	Vivendi	
21 November	Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	Ubi Soft	
21 November	Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	Ubi Soft	
21 November	The Hobbit	Vivendi	
21 November	Hunter: The Reckoning – Wayward	Vivendi	
21 November	Medal Of Honor: Rising Sun	Electronic Arts	
21 November	The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi	
21 November	The X-Files: Resist Or Serve	Vivendi	
28 November	Conan	TDK	
28 November	Iron Storm	Wanadoo	
28 November	James Bond: Everything Or Nothing	Electronic Arts	
28 November	Need For Speed Underground	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Cy Girls	Konami	
TBC	Headhunter: Redemption	SEGA	
TBC	NHL 2K4	SEGA	
DECEMBER			
05 December	Alias	Acclaim	
05 December	Bad Boys II	Empire Interactive	
05 December	Sonic Heroes	SEGA	
19 December	The Sims Bustin' Out	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II	Atari	
TBC	Final Fantasy X-2	SCEE	Wanted
TBC	Gran Turismo 4	SCEE	Wanted



GAMECUBE

Month	Title	Publisher	
OCTOBER			
10 October	XGRA	Acclaim	
17 October	Rogue Squadron: Rebel Strike	Activision	Wanted
17 October	Top Angler	THQ	
24 October	SSX 3	Electronic Arts	
31 October	FIFA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	
31 October	F-Zero GX	Nintendo	Wanted
31 October	Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts	
31 October	Viewtiful Joe	Capcom	
31 October	Worms 3D	SEGA	
NOVEMBER			
07 November	Billy Hatcher And The Giant Egg	SEGA	Wanted
07 November	Buffy The Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds	Vivendi	
07 November	Conflict: Desert Storm II	SCi	
07 November	LOTR: The Return Of The King	Electronic Arts	
07 November	True Crime: Streets Of L.A.	Activision	Wanted
14 November	Mario Kart: Double Dash!!	Nintendo	Wanted
14 November	Medal Of Honor: Rising Sun	Electronic Arts	
14 November	Tony Hawk Underground	Activision	Wanted
14 November	XIII	Ubi Soft	Wanted
21 November	Harvest Moon: A Wonderful Life	Ubi Soft	Wanted
21 November	The Hobbit	Vivendi	
21 November	Metal Arms: Glitch In The System	Vivendi	
21 November	The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi	
28 November	James Bond: Everything Or Nothing	Electronic Arts	
28 November	Judge Dredd: Dredd Vs Death	Vivendi	
28 November	Pikmin 2	Nintendo	
DECEMBER			
05 December	Mario Party 5	Nintendo	
05 December	Sonic Heroes	SEGA	
05 December	XIII	Ubi Soft	Wanted
19 December	The Sims Bustin' Out	Electronic Arts	

XBOX



Month	Title	Publisher
OCTOBER		
03 October	Bulletproof Monk	Empire
10 October	Freaky Flyers	Midway
10 October	Outlaw Volleyball	TDK
10 October	WWE Raw 2: Ruthless Aggression	THQ

CALM YOUR FEVERISH ANTICIPATION WITH OUR COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF FORTHCOMING RELEASES



Worms 3D Multi
Will the Worms survive their 3D reincarnation?

Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire GBA
Even more Pokémon madness? We're in heaven.



Tron 2.0 PC
Enter the mainframe in, gasp, a good licensed game.



X^2: The Threat PC
Has Egosoft created the next *Elite*?

24 October	Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon	THQ	Wanted
24 October	Buffy The Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds	Vivendi	
24 October	Dancing Stage Unleashed	Konami	Wanted
24 October	NBA Jam 2004	Acclaim	
24 October	Rolling	SCi	
24 October	SSX 3	Electronic Arts	
31 October	Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II	Atari	
31 October	Celebrity Deathmatch	Take Two	
31 October	Dungeons & Dragons: Heroes	Atari	
31 October	Fallout: Brotherhood Of Steel	Vivendi	Wanted
31 October	FIFA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	
31 October	Gladiator: Sword Of Vengeance	Acclaim	
31 October	Worms 3D	SEGA	
31 October	XIII	Ubi Soft	Wanted
TBC	Gladius	LucasArts	
NOVEMBER			
07 November	Dead Man's Hand	Atari	
07 November	Dino Crisis 3	Capcom	
07 November	LOTR: The Return Of The King	Electronic Arts	
07 November	SEGA GT Online	SEGA	
07 November	True Crime: Streets Of L.A.	Activision	
14 November	Dynasty Warriors 4	THQ	
14 November	Medal Of Honor: Rising Sun	Electronic Arts	
14 November	Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six 3	Ubi Soft	
14 November	Tony Hawk Underground	Activision	
21 November	Crash Nitro Kart	Vivendi	
21 November	The Hobbit	Vivendi	
21 November	The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi	
21 November	X-Files: Resist Or Serve	Vivendi	
28 November	Hunter: The Reckoning – Redeemer	Vivendi	
28 November	NHL 2K4	SEGA	
28 November	Need For Speed Underground	Electronic Arts	
28 November	James Bond: Everything Or Nothing	Arts	
TBC	Legacy Of Kain: Defiance	Eidos	
TBC	Magic The Gathering: Battlegrounds	Atari	
TBC	Wrath	LucasArts	
DECEMBER			
05 December	Bad Boys II	Empire Interactive	
05 December	Sonic Heroes	SEGA	
TBC	Counter Strike	Microsoft	Wanted
TBC	Grabbed By The Ghoulies	Microsoft	

PC

Month	Title	Publisher	
OCTOBER			
10 October	Commandos 3: Destination Berlin	Eidos	
10 October	Halo	Microsoft	Wanted
10 October	Korea: Forgotten Conflict	Cenega	
10 October	X^2: The Threat	Koch Media	
24 October	Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon	THQ	Wanted
31 October	Beyond Good & Evil	Ubi Soft	
31 October	FIFA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	
31 October	Gladiator: Sword of Vengeance	Acclaim	
31 October	The Sims Makin' Magic	Electronic Arts	
31 October	XIII	Ubi Soft	Wanted
TBC	Chicago 1930	Wanadoo	
NOVEMBER			
01 November	Max Payne 2: The Fall of Max Payne	Rockstar	Wanted
07 November	Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup	Electronic Arts	
07 November	Magic The Gathering: Battlegrounds	Atari	
07 November	LOTR: The Return Of The King	Electronic Arts	
21 November	Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time	Ubi Soft	Wanted
21 November	The Simpsons: Hit & Run	Vivendi	
21 November	Unreal Tournament 2004	Atari	
21 November	Worms 3D	SEGA	
28 November	Alias	Acclaim	
TBC	Call of Duty	Activision	



GAME BOY ADVANCE

Month	Title	Publisher	
OCTOBER			
17 October	Super Mario Advance 4: SMB3	Nintendo	
24 October	Final Fantasy Tactics Advance	Nintendo	Wanted
31 October	Defender Of The Crown	Zoo Digital	
31 October	FIFA Football 2004	Electronic Arts	
31 October	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004	Electronic Arts	
31 October	Wings Advance	Zoo Digital	
TBC	Pitfall Harry	Activision	
NOVEMBER			
07 November	LOTR: The Return Of The King	Electronic Arts	
07 November	SSX 3	Electronic Arts	
14 November	Crash Nitro Kart	Vivendi	
14 November	Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time	Ubi Soft	Wanted
14 November	Tony Hawk Underground	Activision	
21 November	Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	Ubi Soft	
21 November	Harvest Moon: Friends of Mineral Town	Ubi Soft	
21 November	The Hobbit	Vivendi	
TBC	James Bond: Everything Or Nothing	Electronic Arts	
TBC	Mario & Luigi	Nintendo	Wanted
TBC	Pokémon Pinball: Ruby And Sapphire	Nintendo	Wanted
DECEMBER			
05 December	Crash Nitro Kart	Vivendi	

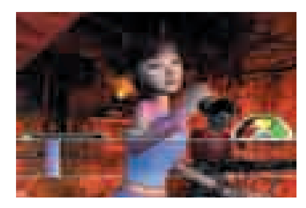
PLEASE NOTE: While every effort has been made to ensure these dates are correct at the time of going to press, they are liable to change at short notice. It's not our fault, really it isn't. We've got notes from our mums to excuse us anyway.

games™ ON THE HORIZON

KARAOKE STAGE

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Konami

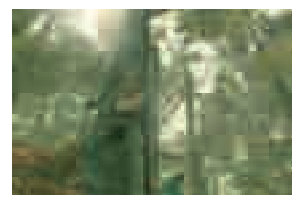
Karaoke might be some people's idea of hell, but with Konami and Harmonix involved in this game, we're interested to see what they do with the format. *Karaoke Stage* went down a storm at ECTS and looks set to be just as popular as *DDR* and *EyeToy*. It's expected out next year, which should give you plenty of time to brush up on your vocal stylings.



METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

Format: PlayStation2
Publisher: Konami

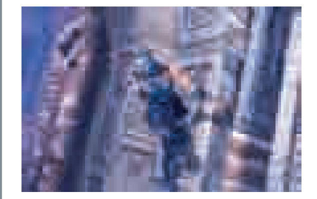
We've been to ECTS and seen the latest trailer (complete with James Bond-style opening) and are getting excited about running Snake through his paces. Hideo Kojima has announced that this will be his last *Metal Gear*, but seeing as he said the same about MGS*2*, we're not that worried.



NINJA GAIDEN

Format: Xbox
Publisher: Microsoft

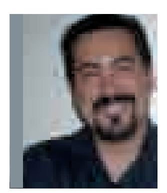
This is yet another of Microsoft's big hitters which now appears to have slipped out of sight (it was due out this summer, but never turned up). Like *Shinobi, Gaiden* started off as a 2D game, but Tecmo seems to be on the ball, and with any luck Hayabusa will fit his new three-dimensional environment perfectly.





THE PEOPLE IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY TELL IT LIKE IT IS…

WAR – WHAT IS IT GOOD FOR?



When I was a kid, my Nintendo might have been the 'greatest invention known to man', but playing war came in a very close second. Ask any ten-year-old boy and he'll tell you: war is cool. Kids have been playing soldier since the beginning of human history, and anthropologists say it's a natural instinct that prepares us for the battlefields of our adult lives. Sure. Whatever. The point is, when the bullets aren't real and no one is going to die from a chest wound, war is a blast.

This is nothing new. War games have been around for centuries, and military-themed videogames have been around from the beginning (*Combat* on the Atari 2600, anyone?). But what has changed is the amount of realism that the medium can deliver. Ten years ago, *Doom* was the most realistic combat experience around. Today, sofa-bound warriors can charge the beach at Normandy or do long-range recon in Vietnam. So what's next? Consider the latest game I've had the privilege of developing, *Full Spectrum Warrior*.

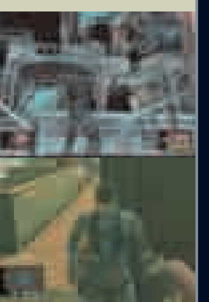
For the first time in history, the US Army (yes, *the* US Army) has co-developed a military 'game' specifically to teach enlisted soldiers real-world battlefield tactics. Their platform of choice is not some super-secret billion-dollar complex in the Mojave, but an Xbox – straight off the shelf from the local high street. But if the US Army is convinced by the authenticity of an Xbox military sim today, where will military games take us in ten years?

The thing is, gamers will always want war games and we'll want it realistic. We want it visceral. We want to be horrified. We want to be heroes. We want to fight and die and save the day vicariously from the safety of our living rooms. Most importantly though, we want it to be fun.

Brian Gomez
Lead Designer, Pandemic Studios

FROM THE FRONT

PLAYSTATION3 BACKWARDS COMPATIBILITY AND MICROSOFT HAS AN ODD RELEASE SCHEDULE FOR JAPAN…



So you can play *MGS1* and *2* on PS3…?

SONY CONFIRMS PS2 AND PSX COMPATIBILITY FOR ITS NEXT CONSOLE

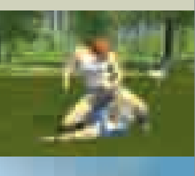
ONE STEP FORWARDS, TWO STEPS BACK

With all the recent talk about Sony's PSP and PSX, it's little wonder that the company has announced some exciting news about its next home console. Keeping in line with the backwards compatibility of PlayStation2, Sony's president Ken Kutaragi has announced that PlayStation3 will contain the same features. Kutaragi-san also made it quite clear that the Sony name was here to stay.

"PSone runs on the PlayStation2 through emulation rather than actual hardware," he explained. "PlayStation3 will offer the same compatibility for PS2 software and the format will continue forever." Although SEGA had previously allowed gamers to play Master System titles on their Mega Drives, this was achieved with a rather expensive add-on. The PlayStation2 was the first home console to come with backwards compatibility as standard (although, admittedly, Nintendo had already been doing this on the Game Boy for some time).

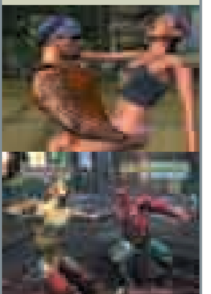
But how will this affect Microsoft and Nintendo? While many are expecting Xbox 2 to offer some sort of backwards emulation, the recent news that Microsoft has hired ATI may cause problems when it comes to emulating the original NVIDIA chip. Indeed, many developers feel that the subtle differences between the two chips may cause glitching in some titles.

As for Nintendo, we'd be very surprised indeed if it allows its next console to be backwards compatible. In fact, we wouldn't be surprised if it distanced itself from the GameCube name completely.





These games are unlikely to go down well in Japan. They've got *Mario Golf*.



Really? Releasing *Tao Feng* in Japan? You've got to be kidding…

MICROSOFT'S LAUGHABLE MARKETING IN JAPAN

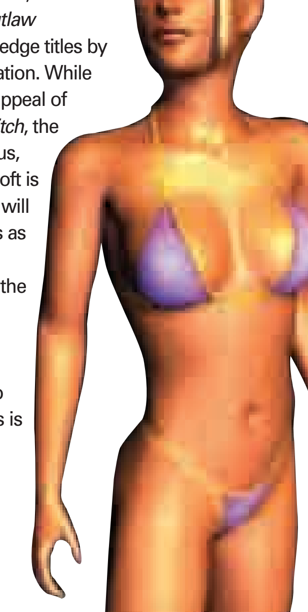
THIS WAS YOUR GOOD IDEA?

It's no secret that the Xbox is a failure in Japan – last month it was outsold yet again by the PSone. With this in mind, Microsoft has announced a new strategy in an attempt to renew interest in its console. And this ingenious new plan? A killer RPG? The announcement of *Winning Eleven*? A remake of *Panzer Dragoon Saga*? Er, no.

Unfortunately, rather than fill the Japanese market with titles gamers actually want, Microsoft has decided to try its luck with five Western titles, complete with original English instructions (although a Japanese manual will be included).

Without the prerequisite drum roll, we'll simply announce the five games. *NFL Fever 2004*, *Outlaw Golf*, *Tao Feng*, *Inside Pitch* and *Outlaw Volleyball*. Hardly cutting-edge titles by any stretch of the imagination. While we can see the possible appeal of *Outlaw Golf* and *Inside Pitch*, the other three simply baffle us, though we expect Microsoft is hoping *Outlaw Volleyball* will achieve the same success as Tecmo's *DOAXBV*.

The Japanese view of the Xbox has been nigh-on hostile at times and this approach of forcing Western sensibilities onto Nintendo-friendly gamers is unlikely to endear the company any further.



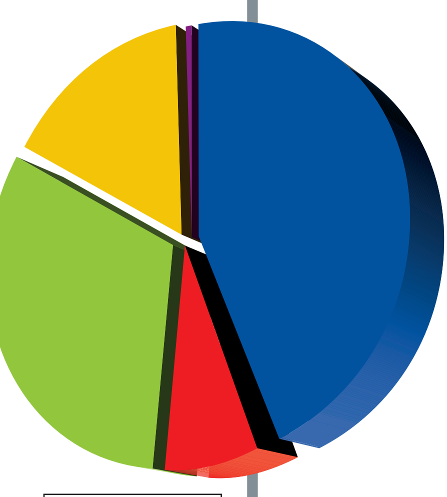
PIE IN THE SKY

IT'S OFFICIAL – FAMILY ORIENTED GAMING IS ON THE UP

After months of maiming, shooting and general destruction, videogames seem to be finally toning down. High-street retailer GAME has carried out extensive research and exclusively revealed to us just how many gamers have been trading in their Uzis for Pokéballs and EyeToys. Last year, many of the top sellers were titles like *GTA: Vice City*, *Medal Of Honor*, *The Getaway* and the gang riot-inspired *State Of Emergency*. But now the ever-popular *Pokémon* and peripherals like Sony's EyeToy are dominating the charts. "The trend that we've seen in the first half of the year is set to continue during the second," said Anna Macario, GAME's marketing director. "GAME has always known that games suitable for all ages form a huge part of this market, and we're pleased to finally be able to show that this really is the case. Our research reinforces that games are finally becoming more mass-market."

Indeed, peripherals like dance mats and the EyeToy (which has achieved astonishing sales in a short space of time) are enjoying tremendous success. "It's no surprise that the EyeToy seems designed especially for kids," said GAME's buying director, Alex Croft. "Its interactivity keeps them leaping around for hours. We want to reassure parents that not all videogames are violent."

With Christmas approaching, publishers will be getting ready for gaming's most lucrative season. EA alone has over 15 titles coming out and the majority are rated 12+ or lower. "The demographic in the games market is widening all the time," said Macario. "It's no longer just about the 18-25 market." Now that less than one per cent of the games currently sold in the UK are rated 18+, it looks like times are changing.



1 APRIL - 31JULY 2003, 407 GAMES RATED UNDER NEW PEGI SYSTEM

- 3+ = 178 = 42.38%
- 7+ = 32 = 7.62%
- 12+ = 131 = 31.19%
- 16+ = 64 = 15.24%
- 18+ = 2 = 0.48%

- 12+ and under = 81%



POKÉMON

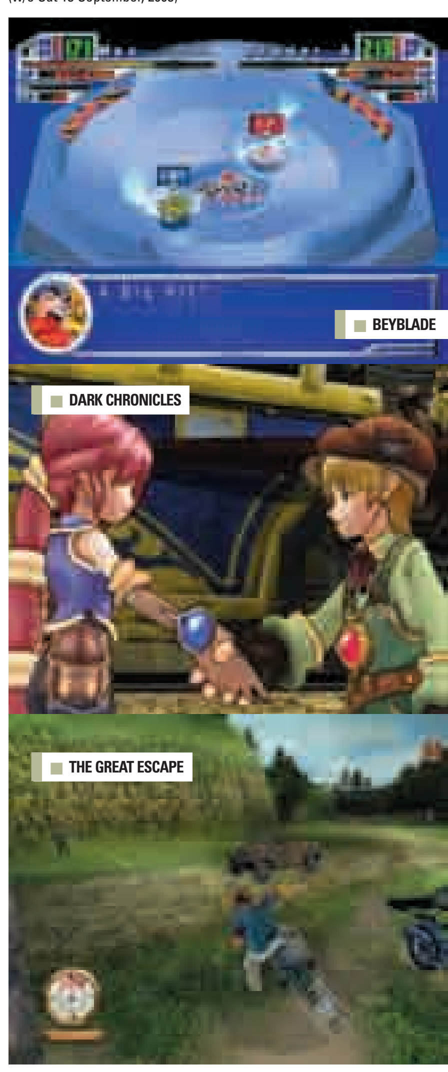
EYETOY

UK MULTIFORMAT TOP TEN

	Title	Publisher	Format
1	Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	Xbox
2	EyeToy: Play	SCEE	PS2
3	FIFA 2003	Electronic Arts	Multi
4	The Great Escape	SCi	Multi
5	Ghost Recon: Island Thunder	Ubi Soft	Multi
6	LOTR: The Two Towers	Electronic Arts	Multi
7	Medal Of Honor: Frontline	Electronic Arts	Multi
8	Beyblade: Let It RIP!	Atari	PSone
9	James Bond 007: Nightfire	Electronic Arts	Multi
10	Dark Chronicle	SCEE	PS2

Hurrah for the Force – Bioware's *Star Wars* RPG storms straight to the top spot, sending Atari's *Beyblade* spiralling down to the bottom (where it undoubtedly belongs, in our opinion). If only Sony's *Dark Chronicle* had done better, we'd be much happier right now.

All information is compiled by ChartTrack and is the strict copyright of ELSPA (UK) Ltd. UK Full Price Sales Charts (All Formats) (w/e Sat 13 September, 2003)



BEYBLADE

DARK CHRONICLES

THE GREAT ESCAPE



CHARACTER BUILDING

SOME ARE CELEBRITIES, OTHERS ARE HAS-BEENS, SOME WERE NEVER MEANT TO BE. WHAT IS IT THAT DEFINES SUCCESSFUL GAME CHARACTERS? AND HOW DO THEY GO FROM CONCEPT TO CONSOLE?



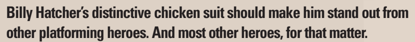
When Nintendo lifted the lid on *The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker* and its new-look Link, the reaction verged on outrage in some quarters. Critics warned that the future of the *Zelda* series hung in the balance thanks to the plans to give one of the big N's most recognisable characters a radical makeover. Of course, these concerns were misguided, with *Wind Waker*'s critical and commercial success vindicating Link's cel-shaded reincarnation. But the outcry that greeted this graphical overhaul underlines just how important game characters are to players and how much they can influence a game's success. Nintendo succeeded, but its reworking of Link could have easily backfired, destroying one of its key brands in the process.

"Having a good lead character can really make or break a game nowadays," says Guy Midgley, lead character artist at Just Add Monsters, the creators of *Kung Fu Chaos*. "The truth is no-one would have played *Tomb Raider* if it was without Lara Croft. Players want games with interesting characters that are not derivative. It is essential to get a likeable and distinguishable character in a game especially now that there are so many games on the market – it's a key way to make a game stand out."

FAMOUS FACES

While a few genres, notably strategy and racing games, can escape the pressure to be character-driven, most cannot. Even the faceless nature of first-person shooters has spawned notable gaming heroes like JC Denton (*Deus Ex*), *Half-Life*'s Gordon Freeman, Kate Archer (*The Operative: No-One Lives Forever*) and Duke Nukem. Yet creating a memorable game character is no easy feat and almost every character-led game will see a significant chunk of development time spent honing, adjusting and, in some cases, scrapping characters. And the number of failures far outweighs the number of successful characters. Would-be gaming heroes like Ty The Tasmanian Tiger and the Bitmap Kid failed to engage players and vanished into the dustbin of gaming history. Midgley reckons the best clue as to whether a character has any chance of success is in its outline. "If you are able to identify the character from ▷

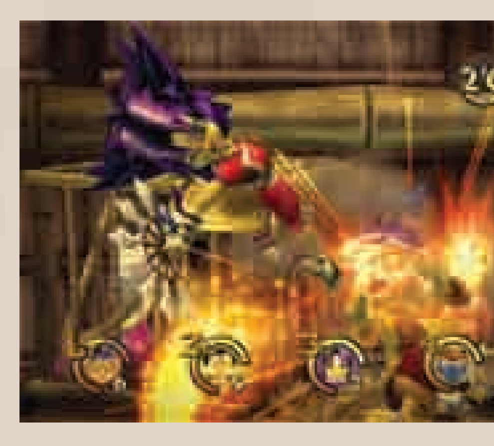




Billy Hatcher's distinctive chicken suit should make him stand out from other platforming heroes. And most other heroes, for that matter.



The lead in *I Ninja* is deliberately out of proportion to enable better movement when fighting and running.



its silhouette you are probably onto a winner as it means they look distinctive," he says. It makes sense when you think about it – Sonic's spikes or Lara's pneumatic chest make both characters highly individual, and the same goes for the rooster comb-headed lead character from SEGA's upcoming *Billy Hatcher And The Giant Egg*. "The big red crest on his head, among other things, makes Billy stand out as a unique character," explains Asam Ahmad, spokesman for SEGA's Sonic Team studio. "In the early stages the character of Billy was going to be an angel, reflecting the fact that the eggs were effectively giving birth. Ultimately, his image gradually changed to a rooster which we felt was better suited to the egg connection."

Radical changes to characters during the development process tend to be the norm. Ninja, the main character in Namco's forthcoming *I Ninja*, also underwent a string of changes before developers Argonaut felt happy with him. "I actually did the initial drawings of Ninja years ago, and when we got the chance to develop an original game I dug him up," says Argonaut's Jamie Walker, producer of *I Ninja*. "Our last project was the *Harry Potter* game and we wanted to have a game with a strong character who had a lot of attitude. Ninja seemed to fit in with that."

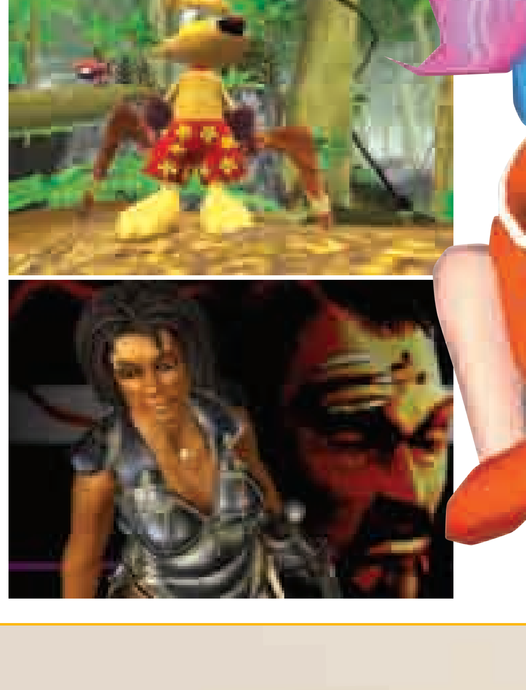
As well as tweaking Ninja's looks during the development of the game, Argonaut organised a series of focus groups with players who fitted the description of the game's target audience, to get an idea of how Ninja would go down with the public. These groups did prompt some important changes to Ninja. "Originally we used bright colours for Ninja which made him look cute even though he is an

LOST TREASURES

While great characters can give games a much-needed face, until they reach the licence-to-print-money status of Sonic and Mario they are rarely enough to spawn a hit game. As a result, many great game characters end up in games that vanish without a trace. The Sixties chic of *Space Channel 5*'s Ulala is a good example – great character, great game, but sank so badly a UK release for the sequel is off the cards. But at least Ulala gained some level of recognition and in Japan she became a popular face for people to have on their iMode mobile phones.

Others have been less lucky. D'Arcy from PlayStation title *Urban Chaos* may have been dismissed as a wannabe Lara Croft but she had a strong personality (unlike Ms Croft) and the game itself has more in common with *Grand Theft Auto 3* than *Tomb Raider*. The eccentric Twinsen from ageing PC classic *Little Big Adventure* is another much overlooked character.

But for every ignored genius, there are hundreds of mediocre and downright irritating game icons lurking on the shelves. Horrors like Ty The Tasmanian Tiger – a brightly coloured hero complete with reams of grating Australian banter – or the Bitmap Kid, a dumpy child with shades who marked the end of The Bitmap Brothers' golden days.



aggressive and violent character – we thought it would be a nice contrast," says Walker. "But the focus testing found that while younger players understood the contrast, they did not like the bright colours as they felt it made it too childish and they didn't want to play children's games. So we made the character look older by adding scars, giving him more muscles and using darker colours."

The use of focus groups is now widespread and developers are more than happy to use them. "We want *I Ninja* to be successful and the focus groups gave us a chance to try and find out what people liked and did not like," explains Wayne Binningham, lead artist on *I Ninja*. Midgley agrees: "Together with Microsoft we used focus groups when developing *Kung Fu Chaos* as we didn't want to end up creating characters that no-one wanted to play."

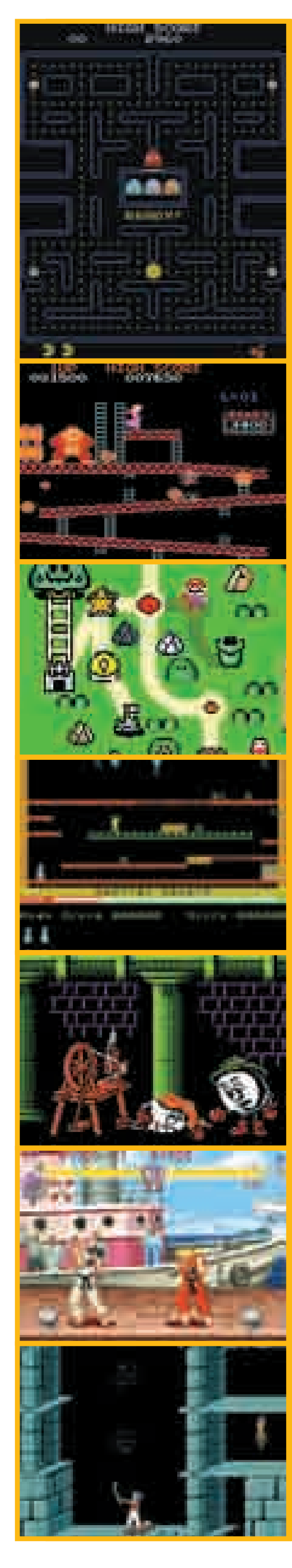
BODY LANGUAGE

This 'design by committee' to ensure that characters will appeal to an audience is a vital part of game design, as an unpopular character can easily deter gamers from buying a product. "The basic idea is to allow the player to identify with the character, hopefully enabling them to enjoy the game more as a result," says Asam Ahmad. "The more the player empathises with the character, the more likely they are to get excited about seeing them develop throughout the game." A great character is no guarantee of a successful game, however. Look at *Space Channel 5* – Ulala was a distinctive and quirky character but the game still didn't sell particularly well. But then perhaps it was this unusual character that put people off the title. Not everyone will leap at the chance to play rhythm action titles, but there are probably even fewer people who fancy being a futuristic Sixties-kitsch news reporter. As Asam Ahmad points out, "There is some truth in saying that by creating characters with strong personalities you risk alienating players." One way around the problem of characters with whom players can't empathise is to make enlist the help of animators and artists.

Clearly, the way a character looks is a key factor in its popularity, but some of the most enduring characters only look like they do because of technical concerns. In the case of ▷



THE MEN, THE WOMEN, THE ANIMATED EGGS...



PAC-MAN (1980)
Inspired by a pizza with a missing slice, Pac-Man became the first game character to really capture players' imaginations. The ravenous yellow ball also blazed the trail for merchandising based around game characters, with a bewildering range of lunchboxes, stickers, books and records (among other things) flooding shops the world over.

DONKEY KONG (1981)
Trust Nintendo to take a character who started out as the all-encompassing evil-doer and turn him into a loveable fan favourite. Before Wario, there was a girlfriend-kidnapping ape turned platform-jumping star. Since then, his family's grown out of control and now there are more Kongs than we'd care to count.

MARIO (1982)
Despite playing second fiddle to Donkey Kong when he first appeared in a game, Mario quickly rose to a level of stardom that makes David Beckham look B-list. At one point, a survey showed that more children recognised the moustachioed plumber than could spot Mickey Mouse.

MINER WILLY (1983)
He might have only been able to walk, jump and die lots, but to an entire generation of gamers he was the epitome of a hero – or the star of a complete bitch of a game, depending on how good you were. Yellow was definitely the new black back then.

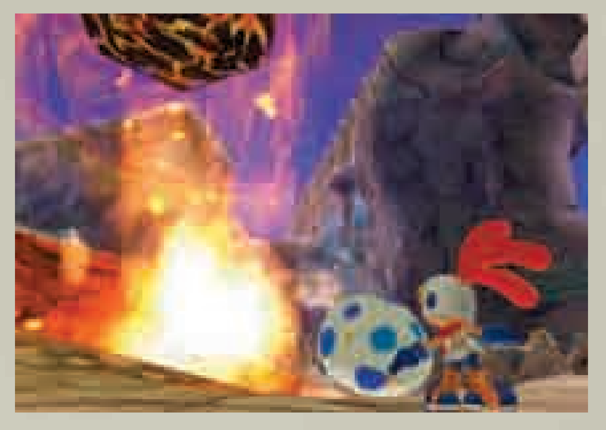
DIZZY (1988)
Like Humpty Dumpty, Dizzy stood out from the crowd through sheer simplicity of design. An egg with a face is hardly the most innovative of characters, but that clean, white oval shape and token grin made him popular with gamers of all ages. Of course, it helped that this was the 'ultimate cartoon adventure' that it set out to be.

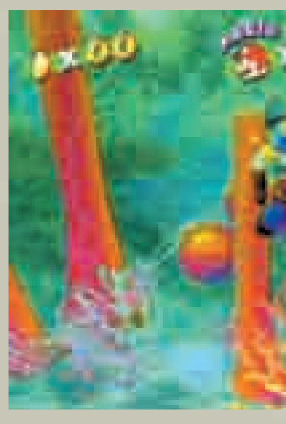
KEN/RYU (1988)
They might have arrived as a pair, but there's no doubt that more beat-'em-up fans have been split over which of the Street Fighters is the better man than anything else we can think of. Even we can't choose between the red or the white. Can't we just have both?

PRINCE OF PERSIA (1989)
The game broke the mould at the time thanks to clever animation techniques that really gave the lead character a lifelike aura. And with Ubi Soft's *Sands Of Time* update soon upon us, it's clear there's still life left in the Prince yet.

continued >>>







The size of a character's stride can be a problem as it makes turning slower and can result in the player revolving on the spot. That's why many characters have short legs.

'cartoony' heroes, their over-large heads or stumpy legs aren't there because they're cute – they're useful. "The less realistically proportioned the main character is, the easier it is to cheat on the tricky bits of design, as people are less aware of how it should move," says Jamie Walker. "With normally proportioned characters, like Harry Potter, the size of the stride can be a problem as it makes turning slower and can result in the player revolving on the spot unrealistically. Characters like Mario and Link follow certain design rules as a result. They are both short and that allows them to move more quickly." This pragmatism is something that remains at the forefront of artists' and animators' minds, mostly because many games would simply be unplayable if their main character was designed from a purely aesthetic point of view. "I think the important thing is to treat the main character like a tool," says Walker. "You have to design the tool properly for it to work well."

The way in which the character is viewed by the player is also a big influence on how they will look. Given that most titles tend to place the player behind the character, the back of a character is more important than the front. "We spent time designing the character so his back was interesting," says Walker of *I Ninja*'s Ninja. "We added a ninja scarf, strapped weapons across his back and made sure the colours we used in his suit showed up his different body parts from behind."

HIGHLY ANIMATED

The distance a character is from the 'front' of the screen is another major consideration for developers. In comic beat-'em-up *Kung Fu Chaos* the characters were set relatively far away from the game camera. "It was a major problem, as being a four-player party game with a lot of action the camera couldn't be as close up as in a typical fighting game, so we had to play around with the proportions," says Midgley. "Using a super-deformed look for the characters was a big advantage here because if the characters were normally proportioned they would just look like stick figures when you viewed them from a distance. Although you then have to cope with the character's big bulbous heads rolling around."

"A GOOD CHARACTER CAN MAKE OR BREAK A GAME. NO-ONE WOULD HAVE PLAYED TOMB RAIDER WITHOUT LARA CROFT"

Once the characters have been designed, the animation progress can add yet more distinguishing features. "Animation is not just a case of getting lots of animation in there but ensuring the animation looks good while feeling right for the player," says Walker. Perhaps the character that is most well-known for its animation is the Prince of Persia. Originally appearing in 1989 he'll soon be on our screens again in *Prince Of Persia: The Sands Of Time*. However, while his distinctively lifelike animation was enough to distinguish him on his first outing, advances in technology mean that animation alone isn't enough to make a gaming hero. Patrice Desilets, creative director at Ubi Soft and one of the key players in the team who are bringing new life to the Prince, says the character has been made more human this time due to the story rather than the animation. "We tried to mimic some Hollywood heroes when creating him," Desilets explains. "We wanted to make him a bit like Bruce Willis in *Die Hard* where he evolves as a character according to how the story progresses."



It takes a combination of great design, animation, sound effects and ease of control to make a character who people like. Focus groups are increasingly used to get it right.

Although this increased emphasis on personality does run the risk of alienating some gamers, there are instances where, according to Asam Ahmad, a strong personality can be useful, particularly in the case of gaming heroes, such as the Prince, who can do things we can't. "We assume that it's hard for players to be emotionally involved, because he or she cannot completely identify with character attributes that may be significantly different from their own personalities," he says. "On the other hand, within the games characters are put in situations that may require their strong personalities or powers. These characters are usually more appealing than others as they serve a purpose." The Prince's swashbuckling antics may be the feature that either entices or annoys players, but they're so integral to the character that they affect the design of the whole game, although Patrice Desilets says this isn't unusual. "You have to build your game around your character when doing a third-person game," he explains. "For example, the palace in the game has got to be really big so that the Prince can jump around , so we had to pay attention to the heights of rooms and the overall architecture."

IT'S GOOD TO TALK

But visuals are just one part of the equation and audio can also have a major influence on a character. For many, the addition of a voice for Sonic The Hedgehog when he went 3D was a character change as radical as Link's facelift. "As players had their own opinion on how Sonic would sound, it was important for us to express how he might talk without alienating the character," says Ahmad. "Rather than affecting his actual personality it allowed the players to better understand Sonic as a character with attitude as well as being a way to make him more recognisable." Sonic's continued popularity suggests that Sonic Team did manage to pull off Sonic's transition from silent hero to mouthy upstart, but there can be little disagreement that some characters are better left speechless. Why have Solid Snake banging on about world peace when you could just play *Pac-Man* and put up with a bit of 'Wacca wacca?'.

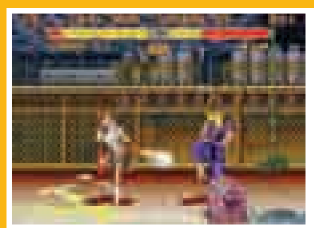
Ultimately, the role of a game character is a curious one. They can help sell games that would otherwise sink without trace (step forward, Lara Croft), or become celebrities and branch off into all sorts of genres (*Mario Golf*, *Mario Kart*, *Mario Tennis*…). Yet some very successful games, such as *Tetris*, don't have any characters at all. But without certain familiar faces games would almost certainly be less involving. After all, when your character falls into a fiery pit would you carry on if you didn't care?

In some cases, a character can be enough to help sell a game that would normally bomb. Lara Croft is perhaps the most famous example, but Sonic and Mario also shift the units…

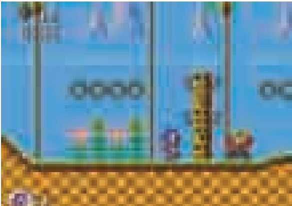


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CHUN LI (1990)
Street Fighter II's speedy, long-legged schoolgirl proved an instant hit when Capcom's fighting classic first arrived in the arcades. Probably the first game to prove that female characters could also be popular with gamers.



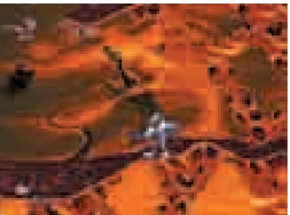
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG (1991)
SEGA needed a mascot like Mario if it was going to compete with Nintendo. The company was well-known for its arcade games, but needed something extra to appeal to the masses. Instantly recognisable, the blue spikes, red sneakers and enormous eyes made Sonic famous all around the world.



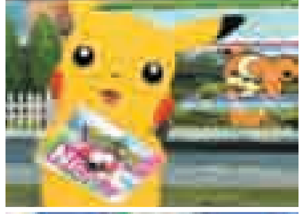
BOMBERMAN (1993)
The simplest characters are often the most effective. Sure, he's not much more than a motorcycle helmet with eyes but then anyone with an infinite supply of bombs in his back pocket can't be all that bad. Over the years, we've got more pleasure from Bomberman than we care to mention.



EARTHWORM JIM (1994)
An unholy fusion of spineless annelid and super-advanced technology, it was more Jim's surreal humour than his heroism that garnered him a place in gaming history. One unsuccessful cartoon series and one ill-founded 3D adventure later, Jim currently resides in the 'Where are they now?' file.



PIKACHU (1996)
Nintendo's Pokémon merchandise has generated millions of pounds of profit around the world, and with Pikachu leading the way it really isn't difficult to see why. Vivid in shape and colour, this cutesy yet aggressive squirrel-like monster has what it takes to appeal to boys and girls of all ages.



LARA CROFT (1996)
Love her or loath her, Lara Croft is a landmark in game history being the first made-for-3D character to really enthrall the world. Sure, *Angel Of Darkness* stank like a glass of milk left outside on a hot day but she has one of the biggest, er, personalities in modern gaming.

NEW-LOOK LINK (2003)
Link's transition to a cel-shaded form is probably one of the most successful overhauls of a major game character ever attempted, particularly when you consider than most cel-shaded games sell abysmally. Proof that major changes to established characters are not always a recipe for disaster.





AXEL
045180
x4
BARBON



Who said a sequel couldn't be better than the original? **Streets Of Rage 2 Mega Drive [SEGA] 1993**

PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2

BIZARRE CREATIONS REINVENTS THE WHEEL. AND THE REST OF THE CAR TOO

DETAILS
FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
DEVELOPER: Factor 5
RELEASE: 18 November
GENRE: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-4 (1-8 Online)

■ It's the original game, only more – much, much more. Could this be the game that Xbox Live was invented for?

Every so often in a console's lifespan, a game comes along that can truly be considered a 'killer app'. A title that justifies the purchase of the console alone, contains things that outdo anything that's been seen before and always remains fiercely loyal in terms of exclusivity. Naturally, in the world of big business and cross-platform profit making, it's a slightly rarer occurrence than some of us might like. Nevertheless, there are a few titles that we can think of that fall into that category, such as *Ico* and *Gran Turismo 3* for the PlayStation2, or *Zelda: The Wind Waker* and *Metroid Prime* for the GameCube. Turn your attention to the Xbox though, and, to us, there's only one title whose 'killer app' status remains unscathed – *Halo*. With the console's second birthday less than six months away, isn't it about time people were given another exclusive reason to buy the big black box? Perhaps in the form of one of the most comprehensive racing experiences ever seen on a console?

Of course, if you've already taken time out for a quick glimpse at the screenshots on these pages, we wouldn't fault you for thinking that, a little polish aside, there appears to be little difference between *Project Gotham Racing 2* and the previous game – especially since, to the untrained eye, that's exactly what it looks like. It's only once you get to see the game in motion, explore the intricacies of the game modes on offer and (brace yourselves) even get to play it that you can truly appreciate just how much work has been done under the bonnet to make *PGR2* a challenger for the title of Best Racing Game Ever.

For the most part, it's been a case of taking elements from the original *Project Gotham Racing*, stripping them down to their bare concepts and then building them back up to a level far beyond where the first game went. And while there's certainly a heavy focus on realism, it's interesting to note that gameplay has remained at the forefront for the development team. As such, a lot of the stats for the cars (which are all designed to respond as realistically as possible depending on their performance class) are hidden, so as not to sacrifice the fun aspect. Accessibility is most certainly the key feature here, so those of you hoping for something close to a car tweaker's wet dream might feel slightly put out.

However, there have been several major gameplay changes since the last game. You can now enjoy a renovated single-player structure that splits the races into different classes rather than set chapters (meaning you can take on new car classes in the order you choose), more difficulty levels that regulate how much you're rewarded for success, a new token system that allows you to buy bigger and better vehicles, and even an improved Kudos meter that now factors in style combos for people who really know how to show off behind the wheel.

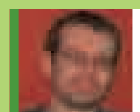
Even something as small as the radio has been tweaked to perfection. Not only did Bizarre Creations buy in tracks that you'd hear if you really were driving around a course in a certain country, but they've hired DJs they consider to be representative of particular locations to record vocal material between the tracks. As if that wasn't enough, the tunes that play while the stereo's on have a real-time compressor on them, which gives them that classic tuned-in radio sound. Obsessive? Absolutely, but it's the details that often matter most.

Just as the important gameplay elements have had an overhaul, so too



GRAND THEFT ANAL

When it comes to realistic racing games, one of the most important elements has to be the attention to detail – after all, the last thing you want is criticism from the hard-core contingent who make up a hefty slice of your market. Thankfully, Bizarre Creations has put so much effort into getting everything right in *PGR2* that it borders on the anally retentive (in a good way, clearly). From applying for city blueprints and taking over 75,000 photos to ensure that each track is geographically accurate, to recording the engine, brake and gear noises of every car in the game, it's almost enough to make you think you were actually driving around for real.



DEVELOPER PROFILE

■ After leaving school in 1987, Martyn Chudley set up his own software company called Raising Hell Software. His first project for the C64, *Combat Crazy*, was unmemorable but a demo of his next game, *RoboDragon*, was commissioned by Psygnosis and turned into *The Killing Game Show*.

HISTORY

- **WIZ N' LIZ** 1993 [Mega Drive]
- **THE KILLING GAME SHOW** 1990 [Amiga]
- **COMBAT CRAZY** 1988 [C64]

■ You want recognisable landmarks? Try the Capitol Building in Washington DC for size. Good enough for you?

"IT'S A FUN-TO-PLAY CHALLENGE THAT CAN BE TAILORED TO YOUR OWN STYLE, TO MAKE IT THE EXPERIENCE YOU WANT"

GED TALBOT, LEAD DESIGNER, BIZARRE CREATIONS

■ Going one-on-one is far more demanding because the competition is fiercer than in group races.

PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 2



Need to move the camera? It's as simple as just pushing the right analogue stick…

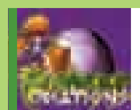
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

BIGGER, BETTER, FASTER, HARDER

PROJECT GOTHAM + MORE, PLEASE, SIR x GOING LIVE = PROJECT GOTHAM 2

"PLAYERS SHOULD BE ABLE TO LOOK AT SOMEONE'S TIMES, THINK 'I WANT TO RACE AGAINST THAT PERSON' AND THEN DO IT"

CHRIS PICKFORD, HEAD OF PRODUCTION SUPPORT, PGR2



COMPANY PROFILE

Officially formed in 1994 when Martyn Chudley brought together his very first PSone development team, Bizarre Creations was approached by SEGA in 1997 to become one of its original '1.5'-party developers along with No Cliche, Appaloosa, Argonaut and Red Lemon.

HISTORY

- **FUR FIGHTERS** 2000 [Dreamcast]
- **MSR** 2000 [Dreamcast]
- **FORMULA 1** 1996 [PSone]

have the tracks on offer. With at least ten unique cities to visit – including Sydney, Chicago, Florence, Barcelona, Edinburgh and even Nürburgring (the whole city, as opposed to just the Formula One track) – you can expect more than enough courses on which to test your mettle. "Originally, the list had about 50 or 60 cities on it," admits Derek Chapman, one of *PGR2's* lead city artists. "Some made it onto the long list and were immediately discarded, but others went right down to the wire before the final cut. For instance, Liverpool was there right until the end because it's our home town but we ended up thinking it didn't have quite enough global appeal."

Global appeal is something that really matters in *PGR2* thanks to the incorporation of Xbox Live. And the thing that makes *PGR2* stand so far out from the crowd is the fact that it takes Xbox Live to the level that it should be at, rather than where other games have placed it up until now. "We wanted to give players something that will allow them to not only help themselves by downloading other people's ghosts and seeing how they achieved their times, but also compete on a worldwide basis," says Chris Pickford, head of the *Gotham* team's production support. "Players should be able to look at someone's times, think 'I really want to race against that person' and then do it in direct competition. With *Project Gotham 2*, they can."

"XBOX LIVE ISN'T JUST AN OPTION HERE, IT'S PRETTY MUCH A NECESSITY IF YOU WANT TO GET THE MOST OUT OF PGR2"

And that's the crux of *PGR2's* online option – competition and going up against your fellow players to see who's the best. What's unique is that it's not just limited to the rather obvious inclusion of online races and reaching the finish line in first place. Instead, it's about virtually every aspect of the game. If you're lucky enough to have Xbox Live, then *PGR2* will log on from the second you hit the power button until you switch your machine off again. During that time, every single thing that you do within the game (whether it be in single-player mode, against friends or actually racing online) will be recorded through Live. This includes all your stats, lap records and overall race times, which will then be added to all manner of online leader boards to compare your racing talents with every other Live-owning *PGR2* player in the world – and we do mean all of them. Just by looking at the leader boards, you'll be able to see how good you are compared to the rest of the world.

On top of all this, the top hundred people on each leader board will have their ghosts uploaded for anyone to download freely, enabling you to see exactly how the masters achieve those top-ranking times. You can even challenge people to races through the leader boards. As long as they're playing at the same time, they'll be able to receive your invitation and act on it.

So could Bizarre Creations have come up with the racing game that leaves the competition standing? From what we've played so far, it's certainly a possibility. There is the chance that people without Xbox Live might not see *Project Gotham Racing 2* in quite the same light, but given that the game's single-player mode is comprehensive enough for any would-be racing expert, we can't see what they could complain about.

SHOW AND TELL

It's all very well having access to a ton of cars in the game, but unless you know which ones are best for your own particular style of racing (or are some kind of freaky Jeremy Clarkson know-it-all), you might very well end up with a dud. That's why Bizarre has gone so far as to include a Showroom option that allows you to see every car in the game right from the off. Even better, you can take any car you choose out to the test track for some practice laps to get the gist of how they handle through a selection of corners and situations, helping you make that all-important purchasing decision.



Multiplayer battles can be split-screen, system link or even online, gawd bless 'em.

CASTLEVANIA: LAMENT OF INNOCENCE



Special attacks like this are handy, but cost you some serious magic.

Enter room, kill foes, move on. We're sure *SOTN* wasn't like this…

TRUE LOVE NEVER DIES – IT JUST COMES BACK WITH A BIGGER WHIP

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: February '04 (Japan: December '03)
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

Konami goes all *Devil May Cry* on us in an attempt to try and bring *Castlevania* to life in 3D. Still, at least it's not like the N64 games…

PS2 **Some gamers rank Konami's *Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night* as one of the greatest games, if not the greatest game, ever released on the PSone.** Obviously, that's a mighty brave statement, and in a million years when all the games ever made are forced to justify their existence to whatever genial (yet to our eyes truly horrific) alien intelligence that discovers their code and our dust, then it's possible that we'll find this to be true. It all depends on whether *ET* is going through a gothic revival at the time.

What we do know, however, is that *Symphony* has a stalwart following that not only remembers the deft handling and seductive depth of Koji Igarashi's two-dimensional masterpiece, but also still has major issues with *Legacy Of Darkness*, the series' last 3D incarnation. And so with the 2D versus 3D lines drawn across this ancient battlefield we look toward *Lament Of Innocence* with considerable interest. It's now in obligatory 3D, Igarashi is overseeing it and it's out almost two years after Capcom's *Devil May Cry*. Somebody's going to get hurt.

You'll take on the garb of Leon, the oldest member of the Belmont family line and all-round decent goth, complete with a penchant for pointy boots and make-up (which were mandatory in the 11th Century if you believe *Castlevania* history). The whole story is concerned with how the family Belmont became involved in demon whipping, so we can file it rather comfortably under 'Origins'. This brings with it an interesting question. Since the project is being brought to us by the team behind *Symphony* as well as the Game Boy Advance incarnations will it keep to the series' 2D or 3D ethos? Considering that adventures into the latter have only caused pain and embarrassment for all concerned (even after reassurances from Igarashi-san himself), we can only pray for the former. Can a game be 'too 3D'? We hope not, but already it appears that *Lament* has lost some of the accuracy found in games with one dimension missing.

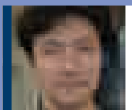
Essentially, this is a combat title with puzzle elements, so special mention must go to the mainstay of the action – fighting. On his quest to destroy the evil that hath beset his land, Leon will have the ability of customisation. This allows him to combine his whip with five sub-weapon systems, and by playing with the bonus abilities of Holy Water, Cross, Axe, Dagger and Crystal, new attacks can be brought to bear. But as many professionals will tell you, there are plenty more things to do with a whip than just going round, er, whipping things. Seven Orbs can also be used in holy union with ten special Action Relics in order to give Leon access to attacks that are intended to please the eye and heavily distress a demon in forty different and highly imaginative ways.

The problem here, of course, is that we've already played *Devil May Cry*, a game that has no qualms about simply providing constant action. *Castlevania*'s graphics engine, though solid, doesn't currently provide the kinetic onslaught needed to satiate such violent desires, and there is a definite sense of watching rather than participating in attacks as you wave your whip and the demons die. This is the danger we feared, that by trying to straddle the respected past of *Symphony* and the more current *Devil May Cry*, we could end up with a product which is neither to any satisfactory degree. Thankfully, there's still time for that to change…

SCREAM DRACULA SCREAM

You cannot kill what does not live… apparently. While it was never like this for Van Helsing, it certainly is for our Leon. Yes, it's time to knock health points out of evil-doers yet again, but now using all the inaccuracy we've come to expect from three-dimensional combat. Igarashi-san has already said that he finds 2D far more appealing to work with, and with memories of *Symphony Of The Night* still echoing we have to agree. Still, *Castlevania* has always been about more than constant aggression and we hope that this extra dimension will give the game more than just a flawed camera. Not that we want to sound pessimistic or anything…

"CAN A GAME BE 'TOO 3D'? WE HOPE NOT, BUT ALREADY IT SEEMS THAT LAMENT HAS LOST A SMALL AMOUNT OF ACCURACY"



DEVELOPER PROFILE

Koji Igarashi has been making *Castlevania* games since 1986, which isn't a surprise since he created the series. He has developed for the MSX, NES, SNES, N64, PSone and now, for the first time, the PS2. That's a lot of time and a lot of consoles. When it comes to fighting vampires, Igarashi-san is the man.

HISTORY

- **CASTLEVANIA: SOTN** 1997 [PSone]
- **CASTLEVANIA** 1987 [NES, C64, Amiga, PC]
- **VAMPIRE KILLER** 1986 [MSX]

Burn, burn, burn, the ring of fire. That's the last time Leon has curry for breakfast.

"THE RICH, FULLY INTERACTIVE INTERIORS OF DRACULA'S CASTLES ARE BEAUTIFULLY REALISED"

KONAMI PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

CASTLEVANIA WHIPPED INTO SHAPE

DEVIL MAY CRY + RYGAR x SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT = LAMENT OF INNOCENCE

RATCHET & CLANK 2



Developers are really beginning to push the PS2 hardware to its limits.

CAN A HAIRBALL AND A SMART-ASS TIN CAN SAVE THE GALAXY?

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: SCEE
DEVELOPER: Insomniac Games
RELEASE: November
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

Sony's unlikely duo return to save the universe again and there are plenty of new toys. Most of which explode.

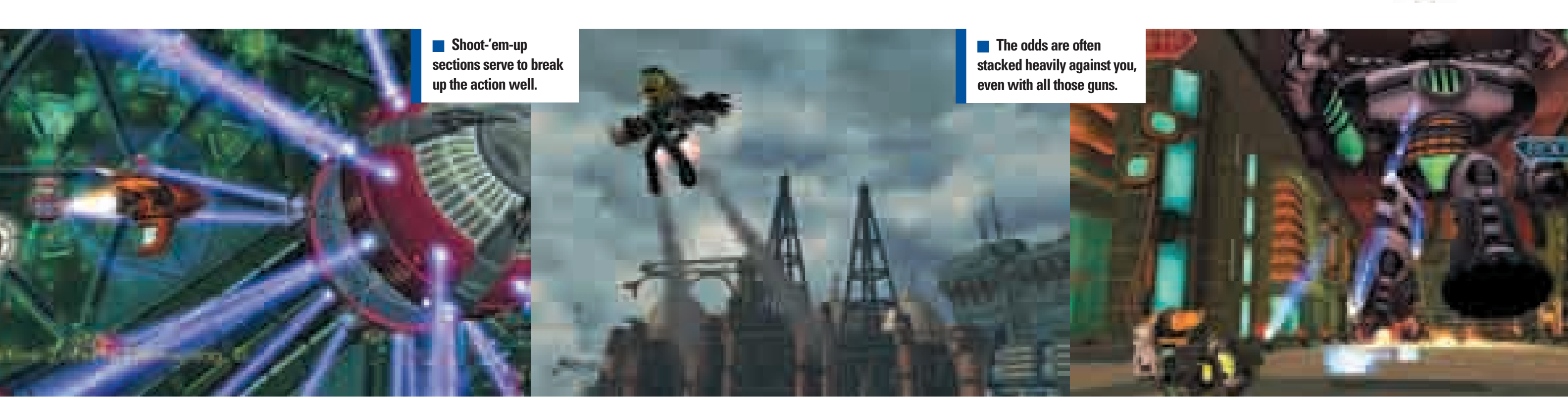
Ever since *Mario 64* delightfully epitomised 3D platform gaming back in 1995, far too many developers have laboured under the delusion that the key to overthrowing the king of jumping is to add more elements to a game. Even the plumber himself has fallen foul – as much as we enjoyed *Mario Sunshine*, the FLUDD pack watered down the platforming gameplay somewhat (no pun intended). Of course, we realise that if it weren't for these added features in games we'd be swamped by identical titles, and it's not even the novelty additions that have incurred our wrath, rather the frequent reliance on them. While *Ratchet & Clank* did have a host of quirky extras, it somehow managed to retain the feel of a platformer – a feel similarly encapsulated in its forthcoming sequel.

The single most obvious alteration to the formula so far is the darkened mood and palette. As with *Jak II*, it would appear that developers are becoming more reluctant to put out cutesy titles, especially in the wake of relatively poor sales of decent games such as *Sly Cooper*. Already, the vast array of weapons gives the game slightly more credibility among the *GTA* youth, but by ditching the abundance of primary colours and making the heroes slightly more edgy, Insomniac is clearly trying to change the perception of the budding franchise.

> "THE GAME'S STILL A WAY OFF, YET ALREADY THE IMPROVEMENTS AND TWEAKS ARE BOTH APPARENT AND APPRECIATED"

Gameplay-wise, *Ratchet 2* has clearly been tightened up a little but there are plenty of minor changes to set it apart from its lauded predecessor. The weapons, for instance, now gain 'experience' as you use them, eventually evolving into a more powerful or versatile tool and making your destructive life that much easier.

Still, if you weren't a fan of the first game or aren't particularly keen on the idea of scything through hordes of enemies and rounding up thousands of nuts and bolts, there's not much that'll place *Ratchet & Clank 2: Locked And Loaded* (if this latest subtitle sticks) on your wanted list. From what we've played, the foundations of an enjoyable adventure are in place. With a good mix in the gameplay and some more tweaking here and there, this could well surpass its forerunner in every respect.



Shoot-'em-up sections serve to break up the action well.

The odds are often stacked heavily against you, even with all those guns.


eMag

X²: THE THREAT



Whenever you need to return to a space station, you can either dock using Autopilot or take the ship down yourself.

You can view X² from all sorts of angles. Our favourite is to get in a cockpit, sit back and watch it all unfold.

There are space stations all over the galaxy – they're essential if you wish to trade with the game's NPCs.

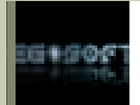
"X² WILL BE THE NEXT MAJOR EVOLUTION IN SPACE GAMES AND WILL GIVE A NEW MEANING TO THE PHRASE 'FREEDOM OF GAMEPLAY'"

BERND LEHAHN, CEO, EGOSOFT

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

DOCKING ALONGSIDE X²: THE THREAT

X + FANCY GRAPHICS x ELITE = X2: THE THREAT



COMPANY PROFILE

Egosoft is based in Würselen, Germany, and has been making games for the past 13 years. The majority of its titles have been exclusive to Germany (with the exception of caveman romp *UGH*), but thanks to the 1999 release of *X* and its fast-growing fanbase, this is now changing.

HISTORY

- **X-GOLD** 2000 [PC]
- **X** 1999 [PC]
- **UGH** 1992 [Amiga]

FORGET SCREAMING – IN SPACE NO ONE CAN HEAR YOU SELL, STEAL AND STRATEGISE

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: Germany
PUBLISHER: Koch Media
DEVELOPER: Egosoft
RELEASE: October '04 (US: Nov '04)
GENRE: Space Simulation
PLAYERS: 1

Egosoft returns with the latest follow up to its expansive *X* series and promises to give fans of *Elite* something to finally be happy about.

Over the last few years, there has been increasing interest in revitalising classic games of yesteryear. And while titles like *Gauntlet Dark Legacy* and *SpyHunter* failed to re-ignite our interest in past gems, the likes of *F-Zero GX* and *Maximo* reassure us that some games really are worth revisiting. *Elite* is just one of many classics that we 'd love to see brought up to date, and though several games have come very close, we're still waiting for the ultimate space exploration title. Thanks to German-based developers Egosoft, it would appear that upcoming title *X²: The Threat* may well be just what we're looking for.

Egosoft's original space exploration title, *X*, has already gained a cult following and *X²* is set to expand on this installed user-base. Starting from scratch, Egosoft has totally redesigned the original universe and it now features over 130 star systems, 53 nebulae and around 1,300 factories that produce all manner of goods. It would appear that the three years spent developing *X²* have allowed Egosoft to create a truly immersive experience.

Perhaps one of *X²*'s biggest achievements is the amount of choices available. Tacticians can plan everything from afar, steadily building up great armadas that can then be sent out to decimate your foes, and all without you needing to fire a single shot. If you crave action, however, it's simply a case of finding a fast, well-armoured ship and seeing how many kills you can clock up. Pacifists can choose to ignore violence and roam the galaxy trading goods with other races (although that's not to say you won't get ambushed by greedy pirates).

Everything in *X²* has been created for a reason – stand back from the game and you'll see it carry on quite happily without you. Freighters transport goods around various sectors, small fleets will start up petty battles and the impressive space stations continue to run as normal. When you consider that there are around 16,000 unscripted objects sharing the universe with you, it really gives you an idea of *X²*'s size and ambitions.

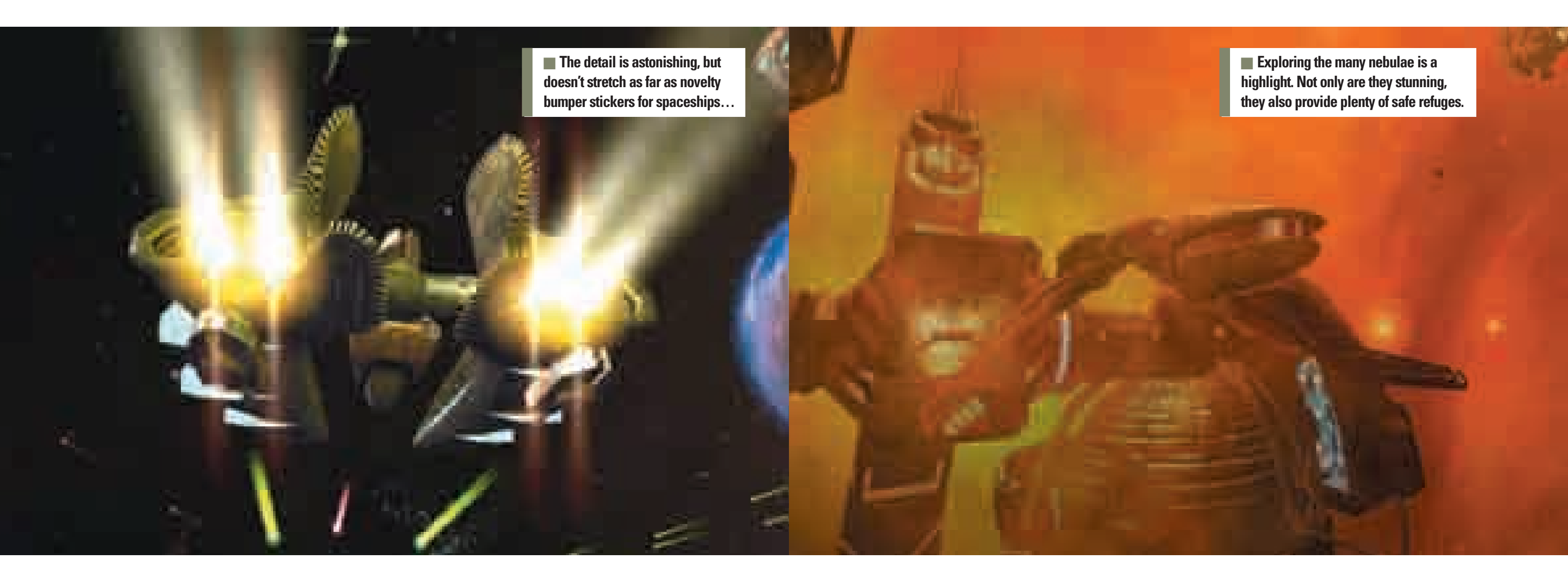
Of course, being set in space you're not going to get anywhere without transport, and while it's possible to travel short distances in a space suit, your best bet is to find a ship. With over 70 craft in total, ranging from nippy Transporters to 2km-long Battle Cruisers, you're bound to find something to suit your tastes. Build up your resources by creating factories and you'll soon be able to afford new ships. Failing that, just follow the craft of your choice and steal it – the choices seem limitless.

With all this depth to the gameplay, it's good to see that *X²*'s visuals have received just as much attention as the rest of the game's elements. Thanks to the latest direct DirectX 9 technology, the game looks simply gorgeous. Textures, shadows, lighting and particle effects are all of the very highest quality and the end result is a feast for the eyes (handy, as space exploration isn't always the most exciting pastime). *X²* may not share the name of the game that it's so obviously based upon, but that doesn't mean we can't wait for it to come out.

CALL IN THE DECORATORS

Okay then, you've saved up a huge pile of credits and have finally decided to treat yourself to a 2km-long Battle Cruiser. That's only half the battle won though, as equipping this behemoth is going to be both time-consuming and very expensive. Fortunately, however, there are more than enough factories available to ensure that you'll be able to fulfil all your ship's needs. Different factories create different base materials ranging from stone to food types. Eventually you'll be able to create sophisticated technology like lasers and satellites with which to equip your various craft. With plenty of different ways to earn money, ranging from escorting to delivering, you'll soon be able to afford the ship of your dreams.

> "X² TAKES THE INITIAL CONCEPT OF THE CLASSIC ELITE AND EXPANDS ON IT CONSIDERABLY"



The detail is astonishing, but doesn't stretch as far as novelty bumper stickers for spaceships…

Exploring the many nebulae is a highlight. Not only are they stunning, they also provide plenty of safe refuges.

BREED



Your Sniper is possibly the most important member of your squad, capable of taking out deadly mortar cannons from great distances.

IT'S CERTAINLY GOT THE LOOK, BUT CAN BRAT'S DEBUT REALLY CHALLENGE HALO?

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC, Xbox
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: CDV
DEVELOPER: Brat Designs
RELEASE: Q4 '03
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1 (Up to 32 online)

The latest sci-fi FPS in the *Halo* mould features ten driveable vehicles, massive environments and some truly jaw-dropping visuals.

As the PC version of *Halo* finally hits the shelves, the flagship sci-fi shooter continues to comfortably shrug off competition from the wannabes trying to dislodge its crown. Rarely a month goes by without some magazine claiming to have found the latest '*Halo* beater', yet these typically mediocre titles tend to fade from memory too quickly to have ever warranted such comparisons. But a glance at the forthcoming debut from UK-based Brat Designs immediately shows why *Breed* has become the latest title to be continually mentioned in the same breath as the mighty *Halo*, so we were naturally keen to check out the preview version in the hope of stumbling across that elusive successor to *Halo* for ourselves.

The events featured in *Breed* take place in the 27th Century and chart the desperate attempts to reclaim planet Earth from the clutches of a hostile alien race known as the Breed. Our story begins as a United Space Corps battleship, the Darwin, returns from a tour of duty fending off Breed attacks on the newly colonised outer reaches of space. While much of mankind's military presence was assigned to this distant inter-stellar war, Earth was left vulnerable and was easily overwhelmed by the rampant Breed armies. Hidden from prying eyes on the dark side of the moon, the Darwin's vastly outnumbered company of genetically engineered soldiers, known as GRUNTS, remains Earth's only hope of liberation from its evil alien conquerors.

Following a couple of straightforward holographic tutorial missions you'll assume full tactical command of your very own elite squadron. Deployed by dropship to take advantage of a weak point in the Breed defences, the first few levels take place on a remote island in the South Pacific. You'll find a couple of basic GRUNTS, a Heavy Gunner and a Sniper at your disposal, whose collective actions can be controlled via a series of basic squad commands. Arguably the key player in your team is the Sniper, whose incredibly powerful scope allows you to pick off turret operators and generally avoid as many close-range battles with the relentless Breed forces as possible.

Zooming in on such distant enemies really begins to highlight the epic scale of the game's environments and the immense draw distances the specially developed Mercury engine is capable of rendering. Players are able to guide their team around the massive landscapes using any route they wish, adding both an element of strategy and a good helping of non-linearity to proceedings. The levels are as scenic as they are huge, with breathtaking water and lighting effects that helped earn *Breed* membership to NVIDIA's 'The Way It's Meant To Be Played' programme alongside gaming's graphical elite.

Despite being stunned by the crisp visuals and ridiculously high polygon counts, we did find the environments, adversaries and basic on-foot action slightly lacking in variety, and were left somewhat unconvinced by the game's many vehicle-based sections. That's not to say the tiny team at Brat Designs hasn't served up an impressive feat that's sure to push even the latest PC hardware to its limits – we're just a bit miffed at not having a clear-cut *Halo* beater on our hands…

SAFETY IN NUMBERS

With an entire planet full of bio-mechanical *Breed* nasties eager to do away with the last echoes of human resistance, you'll need your wits about you in avoiding head-on conflict. Thankfully, during most missions you won't be alone. Even the later space combat portions of the game allow players to switch between various fighters and gun turrets aboard the Darwin. On the ground, a simple but effective series of commands grants you tactical control over your small squad. The function keys offer six basic orders – close in, spread out, wait, fire or cease fire, regroup and change attack formation – ensuring the player that makes shrewd use of these can really gain the upper hand in battle.

"ENVIRONMENTS ARE AS SCENIC AS THEY ARE HUGE, WITH BREATHTAKING WATER AND LIGHTING EFFECTS"



COMPANY PROFILE

■ CDV Software Entertainment was founded in 1989 by current CEO Wolfgang Gabler, and has grown to become one of the largest publishers in Germany. Concentrating heavily on PC titles, the company has enjoyed particular success in the real-time strategy genre with the likes of *Sudden Strike* and *Blitzkrieg*.

HISTORY

- **BLITZKRIEG** 2003 [PC]
- **COSSACKS: THE ART OF WAR** 2002 [PC]
- **SUDDEN STRIKE** 2001 [PC]

■ The user-friendly interface of squad commands allows players to make the most of their vastly outgunned team.

"PLAYERS WILL HAVE UNPRECEDENTED FREEDOM TO ROAM AND EXPLORE THE HUGE PLAYING AREAS"

CDV PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

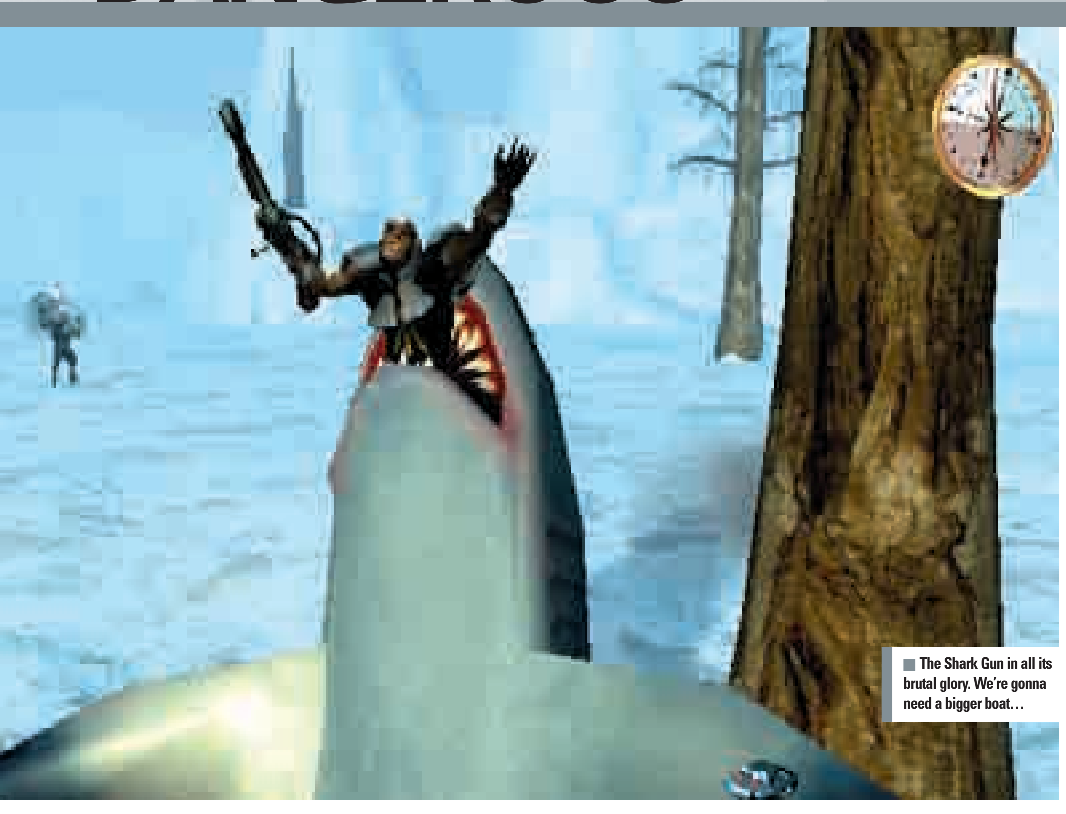
THIS MONTH'S HALO BEATER?

HALO - FAR CRY x MACE GRIFFIN = BREED

■ The Mercury engine makes full use of the latest graphics technology to give the game some seriously cutting-edge visuals.

■ Alien scum are everywhere and you'll find your four-man squad is frequently outnumbered by little green, er, things.

ARMED & DANGEROUS



■ The Shark Gun in all its brutal glory. We're gonna need a bigger boat…

EXPLOSIONS, GUNS AND BLOODY BIG SHARKS? WE'LL TAKE IT

DETAILS
FORMAT: PC, Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: LucasArts
DEVELOPER: PlanetMoon/ LucasArts
RELEASE: February '04 (US: Q4 '03)
GENRE: Shoot-'em-up
PLAYERS: TBA

■ Can this quirky shooter get LucasArts back on track?

"WICKEDLY FUNNY, TECHNICALLY POLISHED AND PLAYABLE TO BOOT, A&D IS WELL WORTH LOOKING FORWARD TO"

We're huge fans of LucasArts, but even we'd admit that its recent output (*RTX Red Rock* in particular) has failed to achieve the same standards as stalwarts like *Day Of The Tentacle* and *Grim Fandango*. Thankfully, *Armed & Dangerous* looks set to bring back that important mix of distinctive comedy and superb gameplay that's been missing from so many of LucasArts' products lately.

Armed & Dangerous doesn't so much have its tongue firmly in its cheek as sticking out the side of its head. A perfect example of this being the new Shark Gun – fire off a shark and a huge dorsal fin snakes its way through the ground. The next moment your unwitting opponent is caught off guard by the huge Great White that erupts through the earth and devours him. Sending out multiple sharks not only guarantees chaos, but also enables you to gain relatively safe passage through some of the more intense firefights.

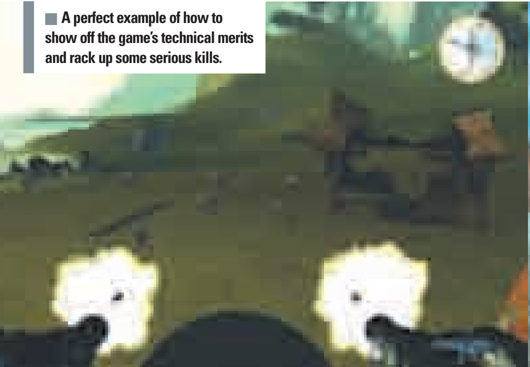
Perhaps the best proof of this game's potential is displayed in the various stages that have you fending off an army. Taking control of a heavily equipped cannon, complete with unlimited rockets and ammo, you find yourself upon an immense wall. Hordes of soldiers stream towards you in an attempt to breach your precarious barrier – allow more than 50 through and it's game over.

Seeing around a hundred battle-weary grunts tearing towards you is an exhilarating experience that's only matched by the sheer enjoyment you get from wantonly destroying them. Should a soldier reach the top, you can always stop them by simply running them over (complete with authentic jerky screen effect). It's all horribly gratuitous, but wonderful fun. Add a camera-friendly jet pack that enables you to attack both on horizontal and vertical planes and you have a title that looks set to be everything that *Brute Force* wasn't.

Outrageous cut-scenes, highly impressive visuals and some imaginative weaponry will hopefully ensure that gamers will give *A&D* more than just a cursory glance when it's released next year.



■ *A&D*'s physics engine ensures every death is a bit OTT.



■ A perfect example of how to show off the game's technical merits and rack up some serious kills.




eMag

GHOSTHUNTER

CAN THE PRIMAL TEAM CHALLENGE CAPCOM AND KONAMI IN THE SCARE STAKES?

With the sole exception of Silicon Knights' *Eternal Darkness*, you'd have to go back to the very dawn of the survival horror genre to find a decent scarefest originating anywhere other than Japan. Ever since Capcom's *Resident Evil* took over the reins from *Alone In The Dark* as gaming's definitive horror series in 1996, spine-tingling masterpieces like *Silent Hill* and *Project Zero* have continued the total domination of the market by Japanese developers. But now Sony has enlisted the talents of its Cambridge-based studio in a bid to succeed where the *Evil Dead* and *Blair Witch* games so miserably failed by bringing us a tale of terror set to buck the seven-year trend of Eastern supremacy.

Ghosthunter follows the misadventures of Lazarus Jones, a typically abrasive rookie cop in his first week on the job. While investigating reports of peculiar goings-on at an abandoned school that once played host to a grisly massacre, our naïve hero stumbles upon some bizarre equipment in the basement and inadvertently unleashes a horde of ghoulish nasties upon the world. One malevolent spirit in particular – who happens to bear more than a passing resemblance to the bad guy from the painting in *Ghostbusters II* – will prove to be something of a handful for the novice policeman over the coming levels and begins his reign of evil by whisking away Lazarus' partner, Anna Steele. But if one man can cause so much trouble, then one man can surely put an end to it all. One change of outfit later and Lazarus is reluctantly ready to face all manner of foul monstrosities and spooky apparitions as he attempts to clear up this ghastly mess.

Helping Lazarus on the perilous quest that follows is a mysterious computer system and a virtuous spirit named Astral, who managed to fuse with him when the legions of vengeful spectres were set free. At various stages in the game players will be able to summon Astral from within and make use of her unique spiritual powers to tackle tricky situations. Along with an impressive arsenal of real-world weaponry, Lazarus also comes fully kitted out to deal with his more supernatural adversaries. Artillery powered by a strange ghostly energy comes in very handy for softening up those ghouls that would laugh in the face of regular bullets. Once weakened, you can capture their tortured souls in a *Ghostbusters*-style trap.

From what we've played thus far, *Ghosthunter* appears to be wisely avoiding confronting the Japanese kings of survival horror head-on. Never attempting to outdo the *Silent Hill* series for sheer blood-soaked depravity, and missing the kind of heart-in-mouth cinematic tension of *Project Zero*, *Ghosthunter* seems to be steering clear of the censors with more of a paranormal-themed action adventure. The game isn't without its air of eeriness but, like *Resident Evil*, *Ghosthunter* relies much more on superbly gruesome monster designs and entertaining action than psychologically scarring chills.

It's something of a mixed blessing that echoes of *Primal* are in evidence throughout the game, but, most significantly, the breathtaking visual capabilities of the engine certainly emphasise *Ghosthunter*'s intentions of mounting a serious challenge on Capcom and Konami's prestigious horror franchises.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: SCEE
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: 7 November
GENRE: Survival Horror
PLAYERS: 1

■ Sony's new title in the grisly world of survival horror combines gorgeous visuals with ghost-busting action.

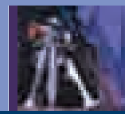
BEAUTY AND THE BEASTS

Although *Ghosthunter* is powered by an enhanced version of the already accomplished *Primal* engine, we were somewhat dubious that the in-game visuals would live up to the standard of rendered shots we'd previously seen. Yet after finally getting to play the game for real, we were nothing short of awestruck by the immense graphical quality our PS2 was somehow managing to deliver – the detailed environments and creature models proudly exhibit some of the most polished visuals ever to grace the system. But despite its remarkable beauty, *Ghosthunter* sadly doesn't appear to be the game that finds a cure for the bane of all survival horror games – the untameable camera.

"GHOSTHUNTER WISELY AVOIDS CHALLENGING THE JAPANESE KINGS OF THE GENRE HEAD-ON"



■ Some of the environments and textures you'll encounter really set *Ghosthunter* apart visually.



STUDIO PROFILE

The Cambridge Studio was acquired by SCEE in July 1997 and enjoyed success a year later with PSone bestseller *MediEvil*. Now comprising 72 development staff, the studio has become renowned for pushing the boundaries of PS2 visuals with *Primal* and forthcoming scare-'em-up *Ghosthunter*.

HISTORY

- **PRIMAL** 2003 [PlayStation2]
- **MEDIEVIL 2** 2000 [PSone]
- **MEDIEVIL** 1998 [PSone]

Make sure you've softened your target up enough before attempting to capture it with your Grenade.

As bullets are useless against ghosts, your special ghosthunting gizmos are essential pieces of kit.

"STUDIO CAMBRIDGE HAS CREATED A DARK, ATMOSPHERIC FANTASY THAT WILL APPEAL TO BOTH GAMERS AND HORROR FANS"

CHRIS DEERING, PRESIDENT, SCEE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

PRIMAL SCREAMS

GHOSTBUSTERS + RESIDENT EVIL - PRIMAL = GHOSTHUNTER

KILLER 7



An extra from *Manhunt*? Looking good, psycho…

The use of colour is about as realistic as the rest of the elements that make up *Killer 7*.

LOOK AT THEM YOYOS – THAT'S THE WAY TO DO IT…

Although *Killer 7* was unveiled at the same time as *Viewtiful Joe* and *P.N.03*, it's strange to think that we've finished the latter pair while details remain scarce about this highly ambitious project. Whether Capcom is intentionally playing *Killer 7* close to its chest or whether the game is still in progress is unknown – it's probably a bit of both since we won't be seeing it until well into next year. However, a recent playable demo at the Tokyo Game Show has revealed a few more details about the most ambitious game of the Capcom Five (now, of course, the Capcom Four after the cancellation of *Dead Phoenix*). This looks to be a game that promises five storylines set on four different worlds and spanning two time periods. Confused? You will be…

The main feature of the game is that main man Harman Smith is an ageing hitman with seven very different personalities. By taking on these personas, the gun-toting geriatric can effectively become one of seven alter egos, each granting him unique abilities which must all be used in order to progress. The identities themselves open up some potentially impressive situations. Some, like ex-wrestler Masked Smith, will get through purely on brawn. At the other end of the spectrum, several of the Smith personas have some form of telepathic or telekinetic ability, a sure sign that their sections will be more 'mind over matter'. We're promised mind-reading and conjuring all round for these cranially gifted characters, all of which will undoubtedly help you reach your goal.

It's currently unclear just how much the characters' sections will vary – first impressions suggest they simply force you to play the game differently, though there has been some talk of each scenario differing substantially, almost to the point of each one being a genre in itself. Hopefully this is one mystery that will be solved over the next few months.

Sure, this style of gameplay is far from original but it's more the execution that sets *Killer 7* apart from its rivals – the visual style is intensified by a strangely blasé use of graphic violence (even for a game about a hitman). Pursuing old-friend-gone-bad Kun Lan, Smith's goal is to get to the bottom of the mysterious Heaven's Smile, a terrible condition that turns the afflicted into monsters. Exactly how a schizophrenic pensioner is expected to accomplish such a heroic feat remains to be seen, as does just how Capcom plans to cram so much variety into one game.

But one thing is clear – *Killer 7* will need some programming wizardry if it's to live up to the impressive hype that already surrounds it.

"HATS OFF TO CAPCOM – KILLER 7'S VISUALS ARE NOTHING IF NOT EYE-CATCHING AND UNIQUE"

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: TBC '04
GENRE: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

Part Eighties pop video, part early VR and a healthy dose of psychological thriller. Capcom continues to break all the rules and split public opinion with another stunning and unique offering.



Just looking at the 'blocky' characters could drive the stereotypical polygon-hungry casual gamer to tears.


eMag

GRAN TURISMO 4



■ We've seen a lot of the rally section so far, but it's easy to see why Polyphony is pushing it so hard.

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

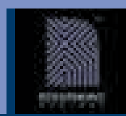
EVEN BETTER THAN THE REAL THING

GRAN TURISMO 3 + ONLINE PLAY x CLASSIC VEHICLES = GRAN TURISMO 4

"GRAN TURISMO 4 LOOKS SET TO BE THE SEXIEST RACING SIMULATOR"

JENNIE KONG, PR MANAGER, SCEE

■ Tighter AI will make for some much closer races than in previous *Gran Turismo* titles.



COMPANY PROFILE

Not many firms can boast the passion and excellence of Sony's renowned racing developer. Having started as Polys Entertainment with a few forgettable PSone efforts, the developer hit the big time with the first *Gran Turismo* and has earned its place as one of Sony's most treasured development teams.

HISTORY

- **GRAN TURISMO CONCEPT** 2002 [Multi]
- **GRAN TURISMO 2** 1999 [PSone]
- **MOTOR TOON GRAND PRIX** 1996 [PSone]

CAN SONY TEAR AWAY FROM A PACKED GRID OF RACERS?

Like it or not, console racing sims don't come much more accurate or concise than the *Gran Turismo* series. Sure, the minor flaws of the best-selling series are well documented, as is always the way with high-profile products, but these never go so far as to harm the games in a big way. As a genre-leading series, *GT* is under pressure to surpass itself with each successive title – something it looks very capable of doing, provided, of course, that this would-be king of racers doesn't ride the armco instead of staying on track.

With the news that Christmas will see the arrival of a PS2/*GT4* bundle pack, we finally have some confidence that we'll see the finished product before the year is out. But we're still sceptical about the amount of features that we've yet to see mere weeks from the game's release. Call us doom-mongers, but we're just hoping nothing is omitted or rushed for the sake of an early release – we've seen numerous titles disappoint due to time constraints.

As the first *GT* to get an all-new physics engine, we were obviously hoping for car damage (among other things) – hopes that were dashed at this year's E3. Thankfully, other new details have gone some way towards making up for this. Riding the barriers may not affect your vehicle but new time penalties, speed restrictions and warning flags will make sure that this kind of dark-side play affects your overall race performance. With lap times that vary only slightly from their real-world counterparts and AI cars that actually race safely rather than allowing you to use them as cornering cushions, this is looking more and more like being the 'Real Driving Simulation' that the series' box art so proudly boasts.

Attention to detail is one thing but Polyphony is, as expected, taking it to the next level. Drafting in modern and classic cars from around the world, the firm has photographed, modelled and recorded countless vehicles. Allegedly clocking in at around one man-month of production per car (in a game boasting over five hundred vehicles), the project has been incredibly labour-intensive and, thanks to the inclusion of elements like the Museum and the classic cars, Polyphony is looking to rope in car lovers as well as the usual gaming crowd.

Let's not forget what is arguably one of *GT4*'s biggest selling points – on top of the many hours of solo racing, this will be the PS2's first foray into online racing (on these shores, at least). This is being touted as much more than simply network play, with the developers planning for it to be more a congregation of car enthusiasts, something helped by the game's impressive depth and emphasis on historical racing. It'll be interesting to see whether this aspect of the game proves to be as inviting as Sony clearly believes it is.

With a level of depth and a staggering amount of events seldom seen outside the *Gran Turismo* series, this fourth true title looks to push the franchise even further towards driving nirvana. Offering an enjoyable racing experience for learner drivers and a heavily customisable vehicle system that will appeal to motor sports fanatics, *GT4* showcases exceptional variety and proficiency, even at this stage, so expectations are high for the game's hopefully imminent release.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: SCEE
DEVELOPER: Polyphony Digital
RELEASE: December '03
GENRE: Driving
PLAYERS: 1-2 (1-6 online)

When Sony needs a game to sell consoles, it can rely on Polyphony Digital, which has been key in the evolution of the PlayStation brand.

TWENTY QUESTIONS

So, over five hundred cars, an ever-increasing track count and online play are all on board, but what's more surprising is how much remains unknown with so little time to the game's release. The inclusion of certain brands still hangs in the balance, as does just how the Museum and other nostalgic features will fit in with the simulation modes (there has been talk of a mode celebrating the history of racing, presumably not unlike *SEGA GT*'s Chronicle mode). The main mode is shaping up to be quite a commitment even though details are far from final. Used cars return for your pocket-lightening pleasure and new AI should make for even more challenging races.

"THIS IS LOOKING MORE LIKE BEING THE 'REAL DRIVING SIMULATION' THAT THE SERIES' BOX ART BOASTS"





It's nice to know that this is one title that has a whole lot of depth beneath the flashy exterior.

BILLY HATCHER AND THE GIANT EGG



You can use coloured rings to help you boost or bounce around the levels.

Some of the bosses are just plain huge – but they're still vulnerable to Eggs.

DETAILS

FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: Rockstar North
RELEASE: November '03 (US: Out Now)
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1-4

Billy may not be as fast as a hedgehog, but Sonic Team's egg-based title is certainly different enough to make us sit up and take notice.

WHAT CAME FIRST – THE BILLY OR THE EGG?

As we're hoping a lot of people reading this will know, it takes a certain kind of gamer to spot a decent game just from first impressions. Someone who can look past obvious stereotypes and see quality for what it really is. Unfortunately, first impressions can also cause the shallower contingent of gamers to label something a waste of time before they've even played it, and that's where the problems begin.

With that in mind, we want to clear up some disparaging remarks that we've heard about Sonic Team's latest project, *Billy Hatcher And The Giant Egg*. Despite the outward appearance, *Billy Hatcher* isn't just 'for kids', neither is it 'childish crap' or 'completely dumbass'. It's an example of Japanese originality and development genius at work, and if you still think otherwise, well, maybe you should clear off back to *Vice City* where you belong.

To appreciate all this though, you have to get past the initial premise that *Billy Hatcher* presents and, as you might expect coming from the combined minds at Sonic Team, it's a little bizarre to say the least. The fact that evil crows have taken over Billy's home of Morning Land and brought darkness upon the world serves only as a precursor to the boy's donning of the Legendary Chicken Suit (yes, that's really what it's called), but none of it is actually that important once the game begins. All that matters is that only Billy can save the day, and to do that he's going to need Eggs – lots of them.

Learning to control Eggs (by rolling them around, using them as weapons and eventually hatching them) is the key to playing *Billy Hatcher*, mainly because without them Billy is totally useless. Sure, he can jump around and move but that's about it. It's only with an Egg that all his other abilities become available and you can make some progress. From hitting switches and using Spring Rings (which help you reach higher places) to wiping out crows and squashing all the fruit that's lying around, it's all done with Eggs.

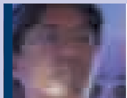
Squashing fruit is one of the most important tasks in the game, as that's the only way to hatch your Egg. The more fruit you roll your Egg over, the bigger it becomes until eventually you can use Billy's special rooster call to crack it open. What's inside depends entirely on which Egg you're controlling. Whether it's a wearable item that gives you special abilities and single-use powers, or one of the 16 'useable' animals that can help solve puzzles, attack enemies or even carry you around, it will always be something useful. However, with 72 different types of Egg for you to find and hatch, it'll certainly take you a while to find them all.

Considering that *Billy Hatcher* has a whole lot to offer people looking for something fun to play (including a sizeable single-player adventure and a seriously enjoyable multiplayer mode that's the most fun we've had since *Power Stone 2* on the Dreamcast), it's clear that Sonic Team knows to stick to what it's good at – albeit with a distinct chicken flavour. We just hope that enough people bother to sample its delights, rather than just dismissing it outright when it hits the shelves next month. In the case of *Billy Hatcher*, we can definitively say that ignorance most definitely isn't bliss. Miss this at your peril.

EGGSTRA, EGGSTRA

This being a SEGA game (and a Sonic Team one at that), it won't come as much of a shock to learn that there's a whole bunch of SEGA-related extras and secrets planned for *Billy Hatcher*. The most noticeable surprise is the inclusion of special Sonic Team Eggs in every level that only become available once you've collected five special tokens hidden throughout each stage. Hatch one and you'll be able to have one of several Sonic Team characters (including Nights, Sonic, Tails and even a Capu Capu from *Chu Chu Rocket!*) as your temporary sidekick. Even more interesting is the recent announcement of several hidden bonus games that can be downloaded to your GBA once you've found them, including *Puyo Pop, NiGHTs: Into Dreams, Chu Chu Rocket!* and even a GBA version of *Billy Hatcher*.

"REFRESHINGLY DIFFERENT AND ADDICTIVE, THIS WILL KEEP YOU GOING FOR AGES. ONE DAY, WE'LL ALL WANT TO BE BILLY HATCHER"



PRODUCER PROFILE

Since getting the lucky break of landing a low-level job at SEGA shortly after graduating from school (something he admits he was never very good at), Yuji Naka has become one of the most influential producers in Japanese game development today. And he invented Sonic The Hedgehog. 'Nuff said…

HISTORY

- **PHANTASY STAR ONLINE** 2000 [Dreamcast]
- **NIGHTS: INTO DREAMS** 1996 [Saturn]
- **SONIC THE HEDGEHOG** 1991 [Mega Drive]

Billy gets regular updates on his progress from the god of chickens himself. Really.

The Egg Gallery helps you keep tabs on which ones you've managed to hatch.

"MOST ACTION GAMES HAVE ONE CHARACTER RUNNING AROUND IN THE WORLD DOING EVERYTHING. I WANTED A DIFFERENT STYLE OF ACTION WE COULD FOCUS ON"

YUJI NAKA, PRODUCER, SONIC TEAM

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

SEGA LAYS A LITTLE EGG FOR US

SONIC ADVENTURE 2 + CHICKENS + MULTIPLAYER = BILLY HATCHER

DUNGEONS & DRAGONS HEROES



You can be a Warrior, a Cleric, a Wizard or a Rogue. Obviously, each character has a range of different strengths.

PLENTY OF HACKING AND SLASHING AND NOT A D20 IN SIGHT

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Atari
DEVELOPER: Infogrames Hunt Valley
RELEASE: 31 October (US: Out Now)
GENRE: Action
PLAYERS: 1-4

Choose your warrior then fight your way through classic monsters and fantasy settings.

It seems that developers are falling over each other in an attempt to put out the latest Dungeons & Dragons game, despite the the genre's inherent geekiness. Ever since the success of Bioware's *Baldur's Gate*, there has been a steady stream of releases, and with no less than four titles due by the end of the year the demand shows little sign of slowing.

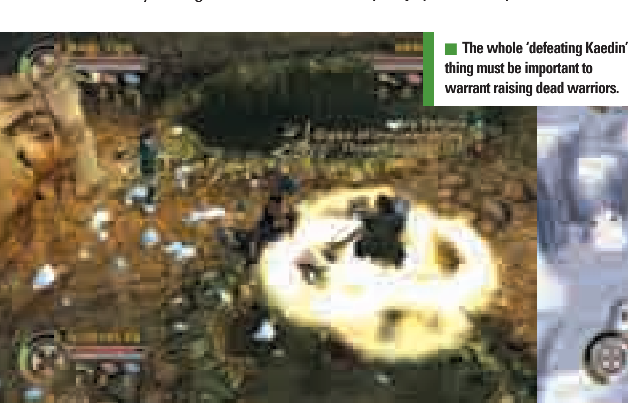
Xbox owners have already had a taste of the D&D world thanks to *Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance*. But while it was an extremely enjoyable romp, the lack of a four-player option was painfully apparent. This was rather surprising, as the actual role-playing game itself is tailor-made for a quartet of players. Now, though, Atari has rectified this mistake and delivered yet another title to look forward to.

The typically mystical story begins 150 years before the start of the game, with the dark sorceror Kaedin devastating the world of Baele. He's overpowered by four heroic RPG types and all is well… until Kaedin reappears. *Heroes* starts with your character, one of the original four warriors, being resurrected by a group of Clerics in order to defeat the rampaging Kaedin who now resides in a floating citadel. What follows is the equivalent of *Dark Alliance* on speed, as *Heroes* takes the initial template and adds more monsters, particle effects and fun than ever before.

> "HEROES DELIVERS THE CLASSIC GAMEPLAY OF GAUNTLET WITH 128-BIT PANACHE"

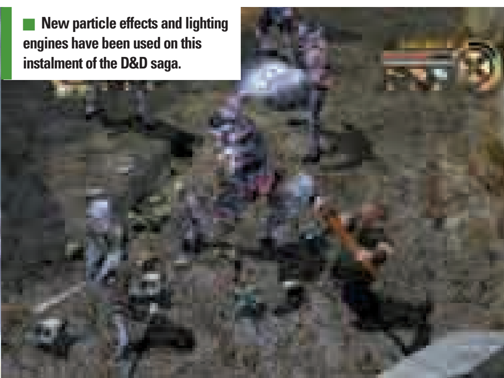
Like its predecessor, *Dungeons And Dragons, Heroes* is essentially an updated version of the fantastic *Gauntlet*, but unlike the Eighties classic, *Heroes* has several RPG elements to give some depth to all the mindless fighting. Killing monsters earns experience points that will eventually cause your character to level up. After this, a whole variety of spells and skills can be bought to ensure that your chosen warrior becomes a force to be reckoned with. Gold is also plentiful and can be spent on assorted armour and weaponry whenever you find a handy shop.

Heroes is already shaping up very nicely, and while it's not going to offer any earth-shatteringly new experiences, it's still enjoyable. The *Dark Alliance* graphics engine has been given a major overhaul and the environments now feature plenty of in-depth detail, along with even more impressive lighting and effects. This has the potential to re-ignite the multiplayer thrills and spills of *Gauntlet* – let's hope it delivers.





The whole 'defeating Kaedin' thing must be important to warrant raising dead warriors.



New particle effects and lighting engines have been used on this instalment of the D&D saga.


eMag

MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE

MAX IS BACK – GET READY FOR A WHOLE WORLD OF PAYNE

There's an unwritten rule in Hollywood that states: 'should a film ever make over $1 million, a sequel may, nay, *must* be made'. So imagine how studio executives felt when they realised that killing off one of the lead characters in *Titanic* meant that a sequel would prove impossible (although that didn't stop plenty of scriptwriters coming up with all manner of preposterous ideas). This catch-22 situation was all too apparent when gamers got to the end of Remedy's original runaway hit *Max Payne* – with practically all of the main characters dead, it seemed that Remedy had shot itself (pun intended) in the foot. Fortunately, however, a two-year break seems to have done the Finnish developers a world of good, as Max looks set for a triumphant return (we can already hear low-spec machines groaning in protest).

There have certainly been a few changes since we last met the king of bullet-time – he's back with the NYPD and sports a much more weather-beaten look than before. It's a few years down the line, and although he's slowly getting over the death of his wife and child, it's not long before Max once again finds himself framed for the murder of his partner. This time around though, Max not only admits to the crime (although an earth-shattering plot twist is bound to be revealed) but also manages to fall for someone…

True to form, Max looks very likely to continue his tragic existence. His new interest turns out to be Mona Sax, a murder suspect and hit woman. Max has several run-ins with Mona throughout the course of the game and she's just one of many new characters who will prove integral to this sequel's plot. Max is also able to enlist the help of various other characters, but despite this support Max is still a loner (there will be no co-operative or multiplayer modes).

One of Payne's original downfalls was that the story was over much too quickly (most gamers could complete it in around ten hours). As a result, *The Fall Of Max Payne* will offer many more hour's playing time, although Remedy is quick to point out that not a single minute will be wasted with unnecessary plot padding. Remedy always felt that a romantic interest was something that was missing from the original *Payne*, so it's little wonder that it describes its new epic as a 'film noir love story'. The comic book strips also make a welcome return and are set to contain even more adult content than before. That's not to say the series will fall to the levels of smuttiness, but many scenes containing Mona and Max will feature some 'mature' issues.

Unsurprisingly, *Max Payne 2* has also had a rather large boost in the visual department; a glance at the gorgeous shots over these two pages should be enough to convince you that it's already looking very special. Textures throughout are of an extremely high standard, with fabrics, weaponry and buildings all looking frighteningly realistic. These high standards continue with the incredible amounts of detail seen in the face of each character. The constipated grimace of the original Payne has been replaced by the look of someone who has survived the events from the first game and remains scarred by them.

The series' trademark 'bullet-time' is also undergoing a massive facelift and should give PC owners plenty of bang for their bucks when the game is released in the near future.

DETAILS

FORMAT: PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: Rockstar Games
DEVELOPER: Remedy
RELEASE: October '03
GENRE: Shoot-'em-up
PLAYERS: 1

Max Payne returns, and though the embittered loner has decided to return to humanity, you can bet it's all going to go pear-shaped very soon.

TAKING IT TO THE MAX

The original *Max Payne* upset many gamers with its processor-consuming specs, and while Rockstar is keeping rather quiet about *Max Payne 2*'s running requirements, we're expecting to have to upgrade our PCs again. A brief look at these screenshots should convince you that if you were considering an upgrade, now would be a good time. Besides, with so many graphics-heavy games due over the next few months (*Half-Life 2* and *Doom III* to name two) we're all going to have to upgrade at some stage…

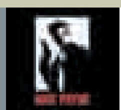
> "REMEDY'S SEQUEL PROMISES MORE PLOT, MORE BULLET-TIME AND PLENTY MORE KILLING"



It's not just the lighting that looks good in *Max Payne 2*, check out the amazing texturing on Max's clothing.

Characters feature astonishing amounts of detail this time around.

MAX PAYNE 2: THE FALL OF MAX PAYNE
PC



COMPANY PROFILE

Remedy Entertainment was founded in 1995 and is based in Espoo, Finland. Although Remedy had only previously released two games (*Max Payne* and *Death Rally*), it quickly became famous for its 3D accelerator benchmark program entitled Final Reality. Such was its success, Final Reality eventually went on to sell some 5 million units.

HISTORY

- **MAX PAYNE** Multi [2001]
- **DEATH RALLY** PC [1996]

Remedy is hoping to create a much more film-like environment this time.

Max Payne still knows his way around a shotgun. He's got smashing hair, too.

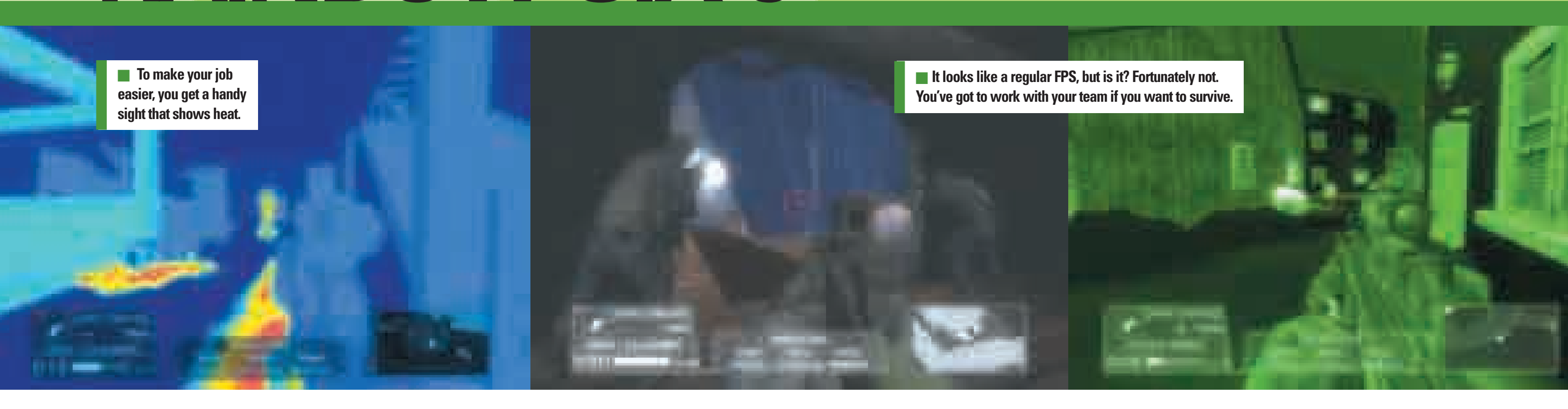
"MAX PAYNE HAS BEEN ONE OF OUR MOST SUCCESSFUL FRANCHISES TO DATE"
KELLY SUMNER, CEO, TAKE 2

VIDEOGAMES MATHS
TAKING IT TO THE MAX

MAX PAYNE + ROMEO & JULIET x GUNS, LOTS OF GUNS = MAX PAYNE 2

Max Payne 2 promises to deliver even more high-octane violence than before.

TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX 3



To make your job easier, you get a handy sight that shows heat.

It looks like a regular FPS, but is it? Fortunately not. You've got to work with your team if you want to survive.

WHERE ARE THOSE TERRORISTS? SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW NO DOUBT…

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: Ubi Soft
DEVELOPER: Red Storm
RELEASE: November '03
GENRE: FPS
PLAYERS: 1 (Multiplayer TBC)

Rainbow Six is a right old mixed bag (in a good way). There's first-person action à la *Splinter Cell*, but with a squad to back you up as well.

Unless you've been living under a rock these past few years, you can't have missed Tom Clancy. With successful books, films and now videogames, it would appear that he has the Midas touch. With that being the case then, it goes without saying that you'll have heard of his games too, such as *Splinter Cell*, *Ghost Recon* and *Rainbow Six*, the third instalment of which is coming to the Xbox after its release on the PC earlier this year.

The name has changed slightly for the Xbox release, with the removal of the *Raven Shield* suffix, but the changes aren't just cosmetic. For one, the plot has been changed from the PC version. The exact details are still being kept tightly under wraps, but we do know that the game will revolve around a character called Ding Chavez. He's in charge of a team of European anti-terrorist specialists who have to travel all over the world to deal with a multitude of enemies and, naturally, you'll join him for the ride.

"PART FPS, PART SQUAD-BASED ACTION, ALL UNDER THE BIG TOM CLANCY UMBRELLA"

Gameplay promises to be a mixture of *Splinter Cell*-esque stealth combined with squad action, all wrapped up in a first-person shooter mould. Despite having all these gameplay elements together, though, it would appear that the game doesn't trip itself up. You don't have to plan everything with absolute precision while trying to deal with squad members who have no AI, but on the other hand you can't just leave them behind as you take on the world armed with only an M-16.

As with many games of this ilk, realism is something that *Rainbow Six* is striving for and, thankfully, Red Storm has managed it with some success for the Xbox sequel, both in single-player and multiplayer action. No longer is it the case that you can pop off the bad guys with one shot, whereas you only get a slight limp after being hit by an rocket. In *Rainbow Six 3*, getting hit by a single bullet in a vital area (such as the head) means you'll not only buy the farm, but probably most of the animals as well. So be careful out there.

In what appears to be a very surprising move, however, Microsoft has managed to get *Rainbow Six 3* exclusive for a short while before it appears on the PS2, obviously with the hope that it'll reach the dizzy heights that *Splinter Cell* did before it. Of course, how well all these features have been implemented will have a large bearing as to whether it is such a hit. Fingers crossed, we'll bring you a review next issue.



It's all about teamwork in *Rainbow Six* – your team-mates need you just as much as you need them.


eMag

GREGORY HORROR SHOW



■ 'Horror shows' happen whenever you get caught by a hotel guest. Be warned, they're more than a little disturbing.

SURVIVAL HORROR WILL NEVER BE THE SAME AGAIN…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: 21 November
GENRE: Puzzle Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

■ Capcom's latest offers more head-scratching ingenuity than its peers.

"IT MIGHT LOOK HORRIBLY BASIC, BUT THIS GAME HAS A DEVIOUS AMOUNT OF CUNNING BEHIND ITS TWISTED LOGIC"

No, your eyes aren't deceiving you, these really are PlayStation2 screenshots, they really are from Capcom's latest survival horror title and this really isn't a game for kids. So put aside any assumptions you might have made, because *Gregory Horror Show* is looking like a fine example of Japanese originality. And it's rather fun to play too.

Of course, it's easy to say that this is just another example of the survival horror genre, but it's more complicated than that – believe us, *Gregory Horror Show* couldn't be further from *Resident Evil* if it tried. Based on the award-winning Japanese cartoon of the same name, the game sees you as a 'guest' at Gregory House, an unassuming hotel run by a square-headed mouse named Gregory. However, it turns out that Gregory House is a weird inter-dimensional portal where lost souls are doomed to walk forever (much like a Travelodge, then). In order to escape, it's up to you to capture those souls and trade them with Death in exchange for your freedom. Weird? Hell yes.

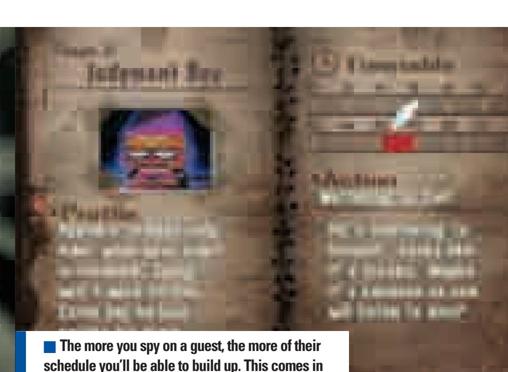
As strange as it sounds, though, this premise makes for some captivating gameplay. While collecting bottled souls might not sound tough, the challenge lies in stealing said bottles from their owners – who are other guests in the hotel – without getting spotted. The key is deducing each guest's weakness and then exploiting it, but to do that you'll have to spy on them constantly to work out their daily routines and decide when to strike. Gregory, for example, takes regular tours of the hotel to check everything – it's only when he's away from his desk that you can pinch essential items like room keys. Naturally, not all the weaknesses are that easy to spot, and when more guests move into the hotel you'll really have to think hard if you want to get your hands on those pesky souls.

Despite being heavily stylised to a point that may deter shallower gamers (you'll have to overlook your first impressions to appreciate the complexity of the game), we've only got high expectations for *Gregory Horror Show*. Games don't come much cleverer than this – or much more original, for that matter.



■ Once you've stolen a guest's soul, they'll give chase whenever you happen to run into them around the hotel.





■ The more you spy on a guest, the more of their schedule you'll be able to build up. This comes in useful when trying to plan when to steal their souls.


eMag

SYPHON FILTER: THE OMEGA STRAIN



■ Naturally, you'll have all the latest kit at hand to take on the terrorists – just check out that fashionable headset…

■ The first-person viewpoint gives you more accurate control over your aim, making it invaluable in gunfights.

"WE WANTED TO CREATE A STRATEGIC BALANCE TO THE WEAPON SELECTION – SOME ENEMIES WILL BE BEATEN QUICKER IF YOU WORK TOGETHER AS A TEAM WITH DIFFERENT WEAPONS"

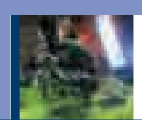
JOHN GARVIN, CREATIVE DIRECTOR, SCE BENT

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

TIME TO KILL THE COMMUNITY

ULTIMATE FORCE + SOCOM + SOLDIER OF FORTUNE II = SYPHON FILTER: TOS

SYPHON FILTER: THE OMEGA STRAIN
PLAYSTATION2



COMPANY PROFILE

SCE Bent has been responsible for all three of the *Syphon Filter* games and, as such, comes with a sturdy reputation for delivering playable triple-A titles. Though the past games built a reputation for originality, they were always plagued by technical limitations. Roll on *The Omega Strain*.

HISTORY

- **SYPHON FILTER 3** 2001 [PSone]
- **SYPHON FILTER 2** 2000 [PSone]
- **SYPHON FILTER** 1999 [PSone]

WHILE PUSHING FOR MORE ONLINE GAMING, SONY COULD STRAIN THE PATIENCE OF ITS FANS…

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: SCEE
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: March '04 (US: January '04)
GENRE: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1 (1-4 Online)

Though *Syphon Filter*'s offline mode is strong, it's the online gameplay that will really capture the imagination, while making those without broadband feel sidelined.

Four years ago, bio-terrorism was only encountered in Tom Clancy novels. Now it's a reality on the lips of every politician hoping to ride a wave of paranoia into office. But one developer took the idea of biological terror seriously, or at least seriously enough to make a million-selling action adventure series. In fact, the original *Syphon Filter* was so playable that for many gamers it even overshadowed *Metal Gear Solid*. Now SCE Bent is back with the ambitious fourth game in the series, subtitled *The Omega Strain*.

The latest adventure to feature Gabe Logan is taking some brave steps, not least the decision to exclude Gabe as a playable character. The reason for this commercial madness is down to the premise of *The Omega Strain* as a primarily online adventure. Instead of playing as Gabe, you play alongside him. As one of his agents you'll scour the globe from Toronto to Belarus in search of a bio-terrorist cell aiming to hold the world to ransom. Bent has also confirmed that *The Omega Strain* will be the final chapter in the *Syphon Filter* series. This game will reveal just what the Syphon Filter is and who is behind the long-running conspiracy – which could implicate Gabe himself.

In terms of gameplay, *The Omega Strain* feels very similar to past games, although the bugs have now been ironed out. As before, gameplay is a combination of stealth, aggressive shooting and item management. An auto-lock system aids the flow of action, allowing for some fast and impressively epic street battles, while real-life weapons and gadgets make the action all the more believable. On the other hand, the enhanced weapon management inspired by *Halo*'s two-gun system offers the missions a new strategic edge.

Those familiar with the series won't be too surprised by such action, though the quality of the game may raise a few eyebrows. The *Syphon Filter* titles have always looked a little ragged, but not any more. Subtle animation, like the way your character clambers around the screen, brings the game alive, while the constant bleeding from gunshot wounds will appease the *GTA* generation.

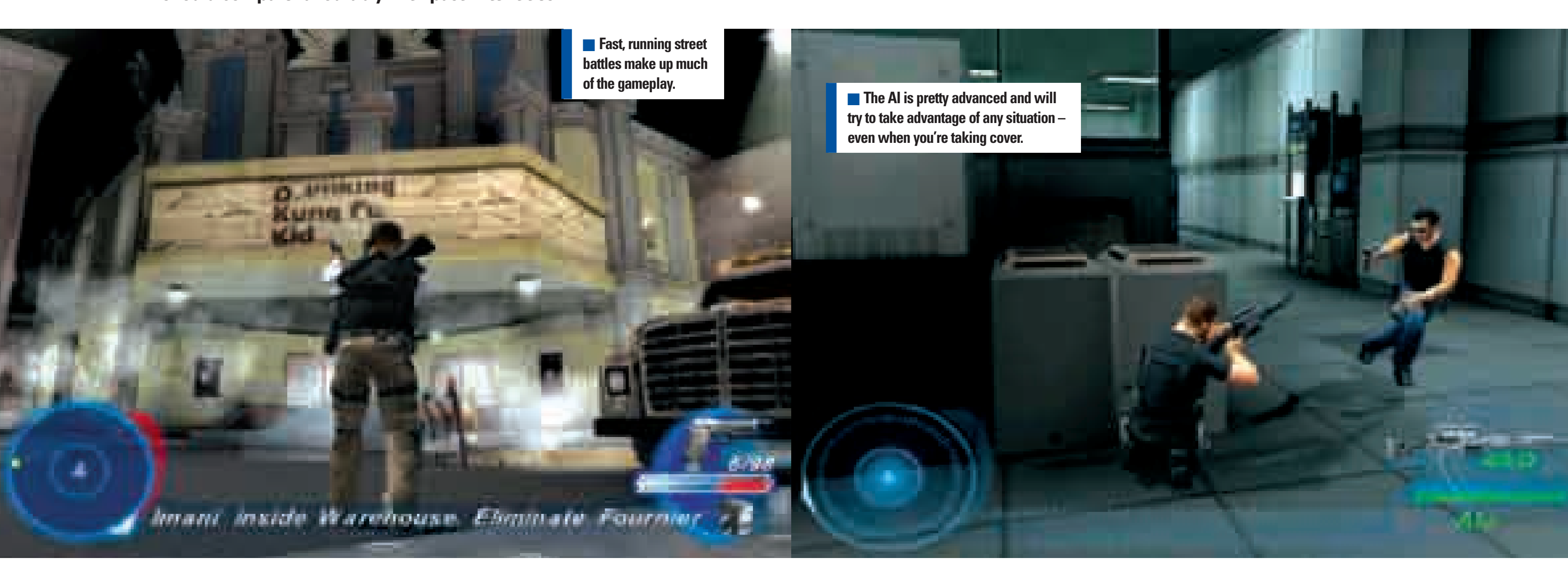
Such things are pretty incidental to the true potential of the game, though. Like many of Sony's forthcoming titles, this is being geared towards the online market, and along with three other players you'll need to work as a team to get the most out of *The Omega Strain*. Though all the levels are playable offline, the game is primarily designed for online play, with every level containing a number of secret routes and objectives that can only be met by playing co-operatively with a full team. Sony plans to promote online play further by setting up a virtual agency where players can sign up their created agents and get together to play, share game secrets and compare stats with the global community.

Of course, this means that Sony is taking some risks with *The Omega Strain*. Withdrawing Gabe as a playable character and focusing on the online features may distance the game from many UK gamers. The future of a great series is in the balance.

LONE GUNMEN

Though much is being made of the online play, there's still a lot of promise in the offline mode. Playing with another CPU-controlled character, the gameplay will still revolve around teamwork and, so far, the AI looks good and the action is fast. Those familiar with the series can rest assured that the spontaneous objectives, variety of game styles and a focus on strategy as much as action make a welcome return. In fact, though lacking the depth promised in the online mode, the offline game should compare favourably with past *Filter* titles.

"BENT'S LATEST ADVENTURE TO FEATURE GABE LOGAN IS TAKING SOME BRAVE STEPS, PARTICULARLY IN THE FIELD OF ONLINE PLAY"



Fast, running street battles make up much of the gameplay.

The AI is pretty advanced and will try to take advantage of any situation – even when you're taking cover.

METAL GEAR SOLID: THE TWIN SNAKES



The best bits of the original are here. The battle with Psycho Mantis is one that we're particularly looking forward to.

This version of *MGS* will use the *MGS2* graphics engine, so everything will be looking shipshape.

APPARENTLY, TWO SNAKES ARE BETTER THAN ONE

DETAILS
FORMAT: GameCube
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Konami/Nintendo
DEVELOPER: Silicon Knights
RELEASE: TBA '04
GENRE: Action/Adventure
PLAYERS: 1

Snake goes retro with a GameCube remake of the original PSone game that got us all excited (albeit about five years ago).

Solid Snake's arrival on the GameCube might have been one of the worst-kept secrets in recent times, but few of us expected him to appear in a game that, if you're dedicated gamer, you should have completed five years ago. Of course, that's not necessarily a bad thing considering that said game was something very special that has people going all gooey-eyed with nostalgia every time they think of it. But the question you have to ask is with the GameCube already showing distressing signs of becoming the next Dreamcast, is a remake of an old PSone game going to be enough to revitalise it?

"WE WANT SNAKE'S GAMECUBE DEBUT BUT, HAVING PLAYED IT, WE'RE PRETTY UNDERWHELMED"

Between Konami proudly boasting about the improvements of the GameCube version over the PSone game (including 'the ability to open and search lockers' – scraping the barrel, anyone?) and us playing through the opening section of the game, we can at least draw some conclusions about how the game is coming on. Obviously, the use of the *Metal Gear Solid 2* engine has done Snake the world of good and everything looks rather nice. However, the fact that the camera still remains quite far out, as opposed to the closer view of *Sons Of Liberty*, means the changes aren't as noticeable as perhaps they should be. Indeed, we were reminded to a point of the Bleem emulation of *MGS* that appeared for the Dreamcast. Yes, the controls have been mapped quite well to the GameCube pad, but other than that, well, it's just *Metal Gear Solid* all over again.

Of course, we can't deny that we're still keen to get our hands on what will prove to be Snake's first appearance on a Nintendo console (Game Boy titles aside, of course), but then having played the preview version and seen how little difference there is to the PSone version, we've got some reservations. After all, our PS2s can play any PSone game we throw at them and any number of local game shops currently have second-hand versions of the original *MGS* for less than a tenner. That's why we can't help but wonder whether Konami is setting its predictions for success a little too high, particularly with a game that'll be well over five years old by the time this version comes out…



New features include Snake's ability from the sequel to hang from ledges, though it's not a vital skill.

The camera moves when Snake peers round corners, but the camera angles are mostly faithful to the PSone game.


eMag

WORMS 3D

MORE ANNELID ANARCHY AS TEAM 17 BRINGS THE Z-AXIS INTO PLAY

For many, *Worms* picked up where *Lemmings* left off as one of the most hilariously innovative and instantly addictive gaming concepts of all time. Nine years on and the evergreen wiggly warmongers have served up something like eight million doses of comical carnage to gamers all over the world. Yet while several instalments in the series over the last decade have brought about some minor visual enhancements and a sprinkling of imaginative additions to the annelid armoury, the seemingly timeless gameplay mechanics have remained intact throughout. However, after *Worms World Party* effectively saw the last drops of potential being wrung from the original *Worms* formula, the time had clearly come for Team 17 to call upon its once-revered creativity and come up with something that would keep its flagship series afloat in the next generation of gaming. It was time to take *Worms* into the world of 3D.

Introducing a Z-axis to the equation quite literally brings with it a whole new dimension of possibilities, but unavoidably sees the enchantingly primitive mechanics we all know and love undergoing a radical overhaul. For anyone unfamiliar with the age-old *Worms* concept, players take control of a small squad of invertebrate infantry and must shrewdly employ their devastating arsenal of weaponry to eliminate the opposing team. Bringing turn-based strategy to life with unrivalled simplicity and hilarity, newcomers would become immediately captivated by its charm whilst veteran players found their tactical wit forever tested by the surprising strategic depth. But with so much of *Worms*' unique appeal resting on its ingenious simplicity, could the series embrace the benefits of a third dimension as we saw Mario so capably accomplish? Or would a Z-axis feel as horribly out of place as it did in the *Pac-Man* universe?

Well, after burrowing a fair way beneath the surface of the latest PC preview code we came away with mixed first impressions at how worm warfare had evolved. The biggest initial hurdles old-school *Worms* fans will encounter are the inevitable changes to how the game is played in the 3D sphere. Whereas the traditional side-on view allowed anyone with an ounce of geometric common sense to quickly judge the trajectory of their shots, working out those vital angles and distances from a 3D perspective is much less intuitive. Switching from the standard third-person viewpoint to the overhead Blimp Camera helps give players their bearings in relation to enemy positions, whilst a handy first-person targeting system helps with the accuracy – but not length – of your strikes.

Similarly, while the liberating 3D environments open up countless new strategic avenues for your team to explore, even basic movement around the map has become a complex affair. Where the left and right arrow keys sufficed for navigation in the 2D world, this time around the WSAD keys control your worm's movement, the mouse swivels the camera and the arrows are employed for targeting. Thankfully with the aid of a sympathetic tutorial we were soon getting the hang of the new gameplay dynamics, although some serious camera problems in the current build didn't make life any easier.

All said, the third dimension certainly expands the horizons of the *Worms* universe, but the inherent complexity this brings into play sadly sees much of the original's instantly accessible charm being unavoidably sacrificed.

DETAILS

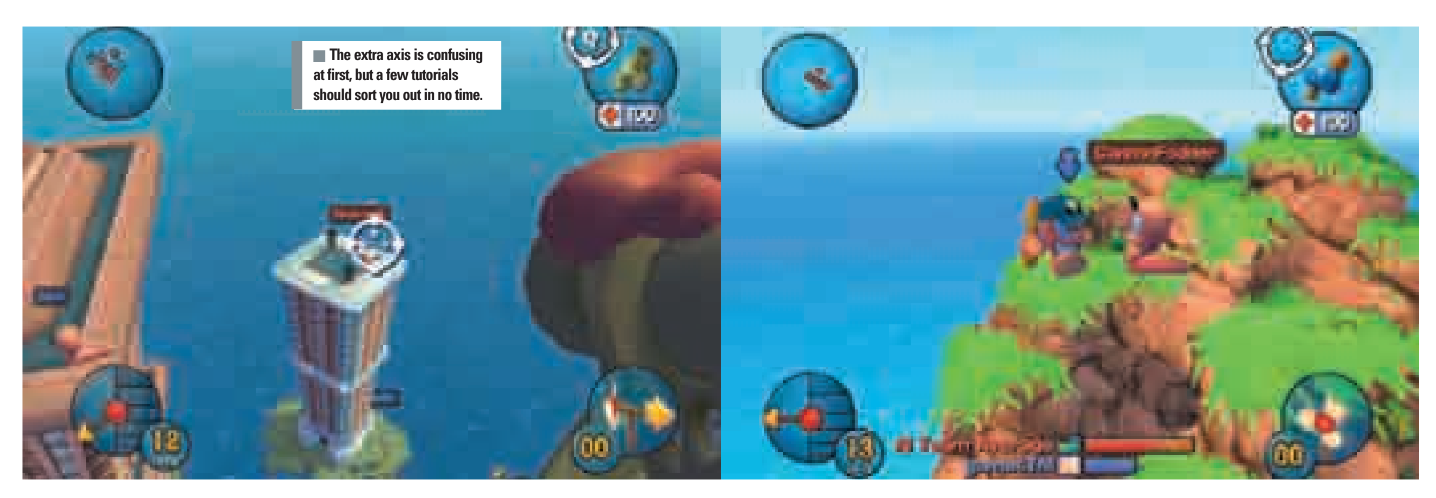
FORMAT: PS2, Xbox, GameCube, PC
ORIGIN: UK
PUBLISHER: SEGA
DEVELOPER: Team 17
RELEASE: Q4 '03
GENRE: Strategy
PLAYERS: 1-16

■ The 3D theatre of war introduces a whole new dimension of opportunities and complexity to the classic *Worms* fighting formula.

SOLID AS A ROCK

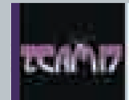
While the fundamentals of play have undergone a transformation, there have been surprisingly few additions to the general content and weaponry on offer. Indeed, *Worms 3D* does exactly what it says on the tin by simply delivering all the joys of the previous games but from a 3D perspective. All your favourite weapons of mirthful destruction make an appearance – from the standard Bazooka and Cluster Bombs, to the dreaded Exploding Old Woman – albeit with a three-dimensional twist. A couple of new additions are the Lottery Strike, which inflicts anything from 1 to 49 points of damage on all those hit, and the cunningly titled Niagra, keeping your worm as solid as a rock for three turns.

"THE ENCHANTINGLY PRIMITIVE GAMEPLAY WE ALL KNOW AND LOVE HAS UNDERGONE A RADICAL OVERHAUL"



■ The extra axis is confusing at first, but a few tutorials should sort you out in no time.





COMPANY PROFILE

■ Based in West Yorkshire, Team 17 was founded in 1990 and was quick to produce the first of many Amiga classics with *Full Contact* in 1991. *Worms* was an instant hit in 1994 and various incarnations of the franchise have kept the studio busy for the past nine years.

HISTORY

■ **WORMS** 1994 [Multi]
■ **BODY BLOWS** 1993 [Amiga, PC]
■ **ALIEN BREED** 1991 [Amiga, PC]

■ The 3D environments allow for more elaborate campaign scenarios, such as the D-Day landings *Worms* style.

"WORMS 3D IS SET TO TAKE WORMS' AWARD-WINNING GAMEPLAY TO THE NEXT LEVEL"

SEGA PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

LITERALLY ADDING DEPTH…

WORMS + ANOTHER DIMENSION - SIMPLISTIC CHARM = WORMS 3D

■ The overhead view is essential for getting an idea of where everyone is positioned, as the camera often leaves you blind to the bigger picture.

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR



A red marker shows a clear line of sight on the enemy, while hidden enemies are shown in green and need to be dealt with carefully…

Evacuated areas have to be secured before you can call in helicopter backup and bring in any ammunition or supplies you need.

WE WANT YOU, WE WANT YOU, WE WANT YOU AS A NEW RECRUIT

When the dust of this year's E3 finally settled, few people could have predicted that one of the most impressive games of the show would have been one that started out as an in-depth simulator designed for use by the US Army – but it happened. While the natural conclusion might be that *Full Spectrum Warrior* isn't anything special compared to other squad-based action/strategy games like *Conflict: Desert Storm 2* and *Rainbow Six* though, playing the game makes it quite apparent that this is something far more interesting and individual.

Pitching itself as a real-time squad strategy game from a third-person perspective (rather than one that gives you direct control over your soldiers), *FSW* offers a huge amount of detail and complexity behind its simple user-friendly interface. Switching control between your two squads of soldiers (Alpha and Bravo) or among the different members of each squad (Team Leader, Rifleman, Automatic Rifleman and Grenadier) is done with a single button press and the D-pad, while actually getting your men to move or act is as easy as hitting one of the main face buttons. The big difference between *FSW* and something like *Freedom Fighters* or *Conflict: Desert Storm*, though, is that you never actually have direct control over anyone. Instead, you issue commands that your squads carry out to the best of their abilities depending on the circumstances.

It's the variety of the battle situations that affects how your men react to your commands. Sending them into an unexplored area and having them come under enemy attack, for example, will see them attempt to take cover as best they can and return fire accordingly. You can also tell your men where to fire and even face individual soldiers in different directions should multiple attack angles be a possibility. However, at no time will you be able to actively separate the members of a squad, according to the procedural rules of the real US Army. Thanks to the advanced AI in *FSW*, soldiers react far more realistically according to what's happening around them – the game even gives each soldier a personality that affects how they behave, from language and professionalism on the battlefield to how they react when a colleague is in danger or (if you're unlucky) dies in combat.

Although the lack of direct control might not make it everyone's cup of tea, there's little doubt that Pandemic has something rather special coming together in *FSW*. With the game well on target for its March '04 release date, expect to see more on it in the coming months.

DETAILS

FORMAT: Xbox, PC
ORIGIN: US
PUBLISHER: THQ
DEVELOPER: Pandemic Studios
RELEASE: March '04
GENRE: Action RTS
PLAYERS: 1 (1-2 Online)

Military precision comes to videogames with this intense third-person RTS that began life as a strategy simulator for the US Army.

"THIS OFFERS A HUGE AMOUNT OF DETAIL AND COMPLEXITY BEHIND ITS SIMPLE, USER-FRIENDLY INTERFACE"



Your squad's formation changes depending on the situation – move them against a fence, for instance, and they'll flank along it.


eMag

RESIDENT EVIL OUTBREAK



■ *Outbreak* is one game that's not afraid of a little bloodletting.

■ You'll be battling more than your average zombies here.

"RESIDENT EVIL OUTBREAK WILL SUPPORT ONLINE AND OFFLINE PLAY TO BRING MANY GAMERS TOGETHER TO EXPERIENCE THEIR FAVOURITE SURVIVAL HORROR GAME"

DAVID MILLER, DIRECTOR OF MARKETING, CAPCOM EUROPE

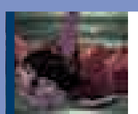
VIDEOGAMES MATHS

THEY DID THE MASH, THE MONSTER MASH

RESIDENT EVIL + GAUNTLET + PHANTASY STAR ONLINE = RESIDENT EVIL OUTBREAK

RESIDENT EVIL OUTBREAK

PLAYSTATION2

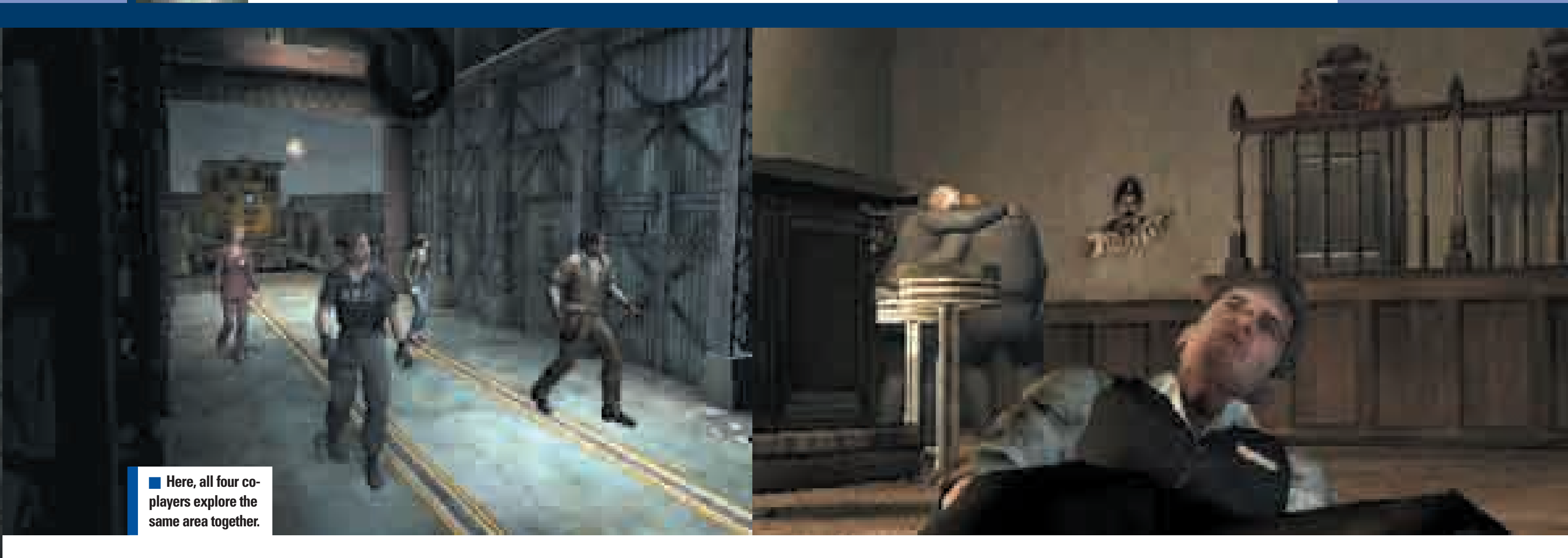


COMPANY PROFILE

■ Capcom began life as the I.R.M. Corporation in 1979, selling what it describes as 'electric applied games machines', before becoming SAMBI Co. Ltd in 1982. Two years later and Capcom emerged in Osaka and Tokyo. Capcom has now been trading as a full-service publisher for two and a half years.

HISTORY

■ **MAXIMO** 2002 [PlayStation2]
■ **DEVIL MAY CRY** 2001 [PlayStation2]
■ **RESIDENT EVIL** 2001 [PlayStation2]



■ Here, all four co-players explore the same area together.

CAPCOM'S SURVIVAL HORROR SERIES LEAPS ONLINE, BUT THE UK MAY STILL MISS OUT

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2
ORIGIN: Japan
PUBLISHER: Capcom
DEVELOPER: In-House
RELEASE: May '04
GENRE: Survival Horror
PLAYERS: 1 (1-4 Online)

■ It's the *Resident Evil* we know and love, but this time with a full online multiplayer co-operative mode.

They say the more things change the more they stay the same, and that's never been truer than with the latest instalment in Capcom's long-running *Resident Evil* franchise. So considering that people usually know what to expect from a *Resident Evil* game, it comes as little shock that Capcom has been careful not to upset the apple cart with *Resident Evil Outbreak*. For starters, the game not only takes place in the familiar location of Raccoon City, but it's also set during the events that unfolded towards the end of the second game – the T-virus is spreading across the city and the government is on the verge of calling in an air strike to eliminate the threat. The intention is that long-term fans of the series will strongly associate with the game universe before they even think about the innovations.

The big change, though, is that Capcom has decided to take its seven-year series online as a co-operative multiplayer game. Essentially, you'll be able to play each of the five scenarios in the company of three other players as you battle through hordes of zombies to escape Raccoon City before the bomb drops. Admittedly, five 'levels' may not sound very much, but each one is promised to last in the region of an hour and a half for a proficient gamer. Even better (or worse, depending on your view), the only save points are at the end of completed scenarios and there's not even the chance of respite by hitting pause, as the game will continue to run in real time behind the options menu, leaving you vulnerable to attack.

While the gameplay mechanics will be instantly familiar to anyone who has played a *Resident Evil* game, what won't be familiar is the feeling of playing as part of a team. Instead of running around the environment and finding every single key to open every single door, the team can divide the tasks four ways. Of course, it's a good idea to buddy up with someone to cover each other's back, but even then there's nothing to stop you strolling off on your own.

It's a strange sensation to round a corner and find another player rooted to the spot, weapon drawn and ready for action when the coast looks clear. A moment later, when a zombie stumbles around the corner or leers in through a window you'll be glad that you had some advance warning. It's this sense of standing shoulder-to-shoulder with other real people and facing down the zombie hordes together that makes *Outbreak* such an unusual and compelling experience.

Perhaps the clearest example of the differences in the co-operative play in *Outbreak* is that of the life-saving Herb power-up. In a solus game, you would simply use the Herb to ensure your survival whenever your health is low. But when you have a comrade at death's door it might be a good idea to replenish their health gauge so you have an extra gun for the next wave of undead. Of course, this then increases the odds of your own death in the next hostile encounter…

The team management of resources adds a strategic element to the *Resident Evil* formula that balances the increased number of zombies and the resulting faster pace of action. We have yet to play the single-player mode, but the online multiplayer is working very well already. If Capcom ensures the friendly AI is up to the job, then *Outbreak* is a very promising proposition, even when it's played offline.

ONLINE? OFFLINE, MORE LIKE...

Rumours are rife that the UK won't get to take *Outbreak* online, so we spoke to Tsuyoshi Tanaka, general manager for R&D Studio Number One at Capcom. He spoke of compatibility problems between the Japanese and European network configurations that could possibly rule out online play for us, but did assure us that his developers "are doing everything they can to make it happen." Capcom is developing a single-player offline mode that sees you play the same levels as the online game but with two CPU-controlled characters as your comrades. Just in case, perhaps?

"WITH MORE ZOMBIES THAN EVER BEFORE, IT'S A GOOD IDEA TO BUDDY UP WITH SOMEONE TO COVER YOUR BACK"

SSX 3

IT'S ALL GETTING A BIT TRICKY IN THE SECOND SSX SEQUEL

DETAILS

FORMAT: PlayStation2, Xbox, GameCube
ORIGIN: Canada
PUBLISHER: EA Sports Big
DEVELOPER: EA Canada
RELEASE: 24 October
GENRE: Extreme Sports
PLAYERS: 1-4

■ *SSX* takes extreme snowboarding off-road, placing an entire mountain at your disposal and letting you call the shots.

The snowboarding craze that swept the world during the mid-Nineties was met by an inevitable avalanche of games that offered your average joe a vicarious taste of the adrenaline-fuelled boarding scene from the comfort of their own home. Sadly, the majority of these early titles failed to go far beyond the 'let's make a snowboarding game' idea, and even the better examples like Nintendo's *1080° Snowboarding* offered little substance to expand on the rather basic ride. That was until the PS2 came along, however, with the immensely entertaining *SSX* among its impressive line-up of launch titles. Putting the next-generation hardware to full use, the first game in EA Sports' larger-than-life 'Big' range managed to fuse an instantly thrilling experience with the *Tony Hawk*-esque depth the genre was so badly lacking.

But with the core gameplay dynamics mastered, and a multiformat follow-up that had only a sprinkling of enhancements rather than the hallmarks of a true sequel, would the potential limitations of the snowboarding theme prevent a great game from developing into a great series? While Neversoft enjoyed the freedom to let their imaginations run wild in bringing every skateboarding possibility to the *Tony Hawk* games, the creative team at EA Canada were rather more constrained by the platform of a snow-covered mountain. Yet after almost two years of toil, those sequel-spawning maestros have finally come up with an enticing third instalment.

Aside from the obligatory tweaks to just about every area of play and presentation, a major structural overhaul now sees the core gravity-defying action padded out with the ever-popular concept of free roaming. This time around, the three massive peaks of an entire mountain play host to the array of competitions and challenges, with players now able to pick and choose from the events while they meander down the slopes. There are plenty of hidden areas scattered around the huge environments, and straying from the beaten track will also uncover areas of particular danger that should really test your boarding skills. The open-ended wandering also allows players of varying expertise the freedom to take whatever they want from the game. Seasoned boarders won't be subjected to a progressive framework designed to suit the 'average' gamer, but can instead set about specialising in their favoured events while newcomers can create their own learning curve and progress at any pace they wish.

The events themselves are split into Race, Big Air, Slope Style and Super Pipe contests, offering a suitably varied range of challenges that call on entirely different elements of your boarding repertoire. Major improvements to the course design are abundant, with multi-branching pathways offering endless replay potential while opportunities for extreme airtime make it possible to pull off more mind-boggling combos than ever before. The tricks interface has been tweaked and more outlandish Uber-moves made possible, but the gameplay retains its alluring balance of accessibility and underlying depth.

An all-new *Vice City*-style radio station blasting out tunes by the likes of The Chemical Brothers and Red Hot Chilli Peppers rounds off the improvements that culminate in a worthy addition to the *SSX* legacy. Fans of the series might just find this dose of freeform boarding action better than *SSX*, as Gareth Gates would say…

KING OF THE HILL

SSX 3 **sees the return of six characters from the *SSX Tricky* stable, while introducing four completely new riders – including a 12-year-old boarding prodigy and an eccentric Swede. Intriguingly, any of the characters' starting attributes can be manipulated to create a boarder suited to your preferred style of play rather than having to pick the character with the particular skills you require. The combat element still allows players to gain the upper hand over their opponents through foul play, and the rivalry system ensures that anyone you upset will have it in for you the next time you meet.**

"THE OPEN-ENDED WANDERING LETS YOU TAKE WHATEVER YOU WANT FROM THE GAME"



■ We're not sure we can advocate the practice of night-time boarding, unless, of course, you're got a luminous board.



PUBLISHER PROFILE

Since the release of *SSX* in 2000, an impressive portfolio of titles has been published under the EA Sports Big brand. The distinctive over-the-top flavour of these games sees realism replaced with a total emphasis on fun, and has even managed to produce an entertaining wrestling title…

HISTORY

- **DEF JAM VENDETTA** 2003 [PlayStation2, GameCube]
- **NBA STREET** 2001 [PlayStation2, GameCube]
- **SSX** 2000 [PlayStation2]

"CONQUER THE MONUMENTAL PEAK BY CARVING IT UP WHERE YOU WANT, WHEN YOU WANT, AND HOW YOU WANT"

EA SPORTS BIG PRESS RELEASE

VIDEOGAMES MATHS

ACCESS ALL AREAS

SSX TRICKY + MULTIPLE PATHS x AIRTIME = SSX 3

Going for big air and pulling off as many stunts as possible will help boost your score, and chicks dig big scores.

SHOWCASE

YET MORE DIGITAL DELIGHTS TO WARM YOUR COCKLES ON A CHILLY AUTUMN EVENING

BATEN KAITOS

XENOSAGA, TALES AND NOW THIS…

Format:	GameCube
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Namco
Developer:	In-House
Release:	TBC
Genre:	RPG
Players:	1





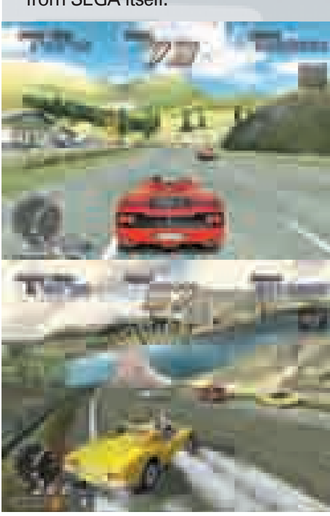
Having impressed us with some of its recent role-playing efforts, it's becoming increasingly clear that Namco has its heart set on making this genre its own as it has with fighters and racers in the past. With a pool of talent that has been involved with everything from *Final Fantasy* to *Resident Evil*, *Baten Kaitos*' team is no stranger to creating stunning titles, and we're hoping this card-based adventure is fair testament to this. With an art style to die for and an original and unique combat system (seamlessly using cards to act, the game can seem more real-time than turn-based), hopes are high for this fantasy RPG that lands in Japan at the end of the year.

OUT RUN 2

PINCH YOURSELF ALL YOU LIKE – THIS IS NO DREAM

Format:	Arcade
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	SEGA Amusements
Developer:	AM2
Release:	Q4 '04
Genre:	Driving
Players:	1

The years of waiting are almost over, and as early as this Christmas arcades the world over could be home to the most anticipated racing sequel in ages. Sporting official Ferrari vehicles and some 15 courses (the route planning of yesteryear returns), there will be several different play modes on offer. One such mode gauges your ability to win over the fine lady in the passenger seat with some crazy driving, though there are the more traditional modes for the racing purist. Naturally, the fact that the game will run on the Chojiro board has fuelled all sorts of rumours of an Xbox port, but we won't start holding our breath until we hear it from SEGA itself.



ONIMUSHA TACTICS

SQUARE ISN'T THE ONLY ONE GETTING ALL TACTICAL

Format:	Game Boy Advance
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Capcom
Developer:	In-House
Release:	November '04
Genre:	RPG
Players:	1



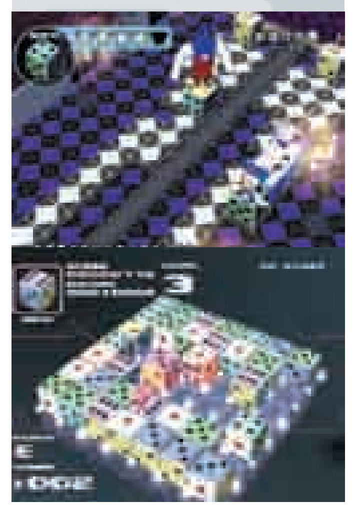
Capcom's ninja-filled adventures may not be the natural starting point for a tactical RPG, nor may the Japanese firm be the obvious creator of such a product, but both these unlikelihoods have come to pass – Jubei, Samasonuke and co have donned their thinking caps and are headed for the GBA. Taking more than a few leaves from the *Final Fantasy Tactics* book, this isometric brainteaser is joining the ever-growing ranks of portable strategy games. Initial impressions would lead us to believe this to be a more streamlined affair than many of its in-depth predecessors, but the real question is will it have what it takes to tackle the big guns of the genre? Watch this space…

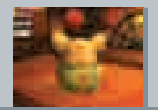
BOMBASTIC

MORE SIX-SIDED FRIVOLITY FROM CAPCOM

Format:	PlayStation2
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Capcom
Developer:	In-House
Release:	November '04
Genre:	Puzzle
Players:	1-5

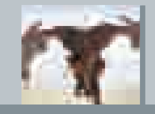
When it comes to puzzle games, the PSone has more wannabe classics than most consoles. From *Kula World* and *Kurushi* to the likes of *Suzuki Bakuhatsu*, the machine has a wealth of puzzling sequel potential. This hasn't gone unnoticed and one of the better old-school thinkers, the superb *Devil Dice*, has been brought bang up to date (well, as up to date as rolling around on top of dice can be). Improved multiplayer and a full-on Quest mode rank among the main inclusions with new rules and explosions putting the power of the PS2 to good use, but the idea remains the same – arrange similar dice faces by rolling them around. Puzzling at its simplistic best.





DELAYED – FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES (GC)

■ Again? Unfortunately so. Several of us took this news so badly that we've defied morals, willpower and bank managers to import the game from Japan. Nintendo may be pushing this title for the second Christmas running…



CANNED – DEAD PHOENIX (GC)

■ That's right, flying fans – Capcom's bid at *Panzer Dragoon*-esque glory has been dealt a blow, largely due to the fact that the game has been cancelled. We'd love to act all surprised and disappointed, but, well, we're neither.

CHIBIROBO

ALL HAIL THE RECHARGEABLE HERO

Format:	GameCube
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Bandai
Developer:	In-House
Release:	TBC
Genre:	Adventure
Players:	1



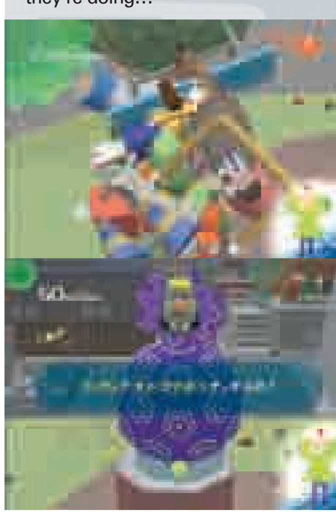
As Feargal Sharkey will tell you, a good heart these days is hard to find. This is why we have faith in Bandai's latest hero because, amazingly, he doesn't have one. Chibirobo is a tiny rechargeable robot who has to juggle adventuring with finding power outlets to keep himself energised. The game is a strange mix of point-and-click, puzzling and (artificial) life sim, requiring you to teach Chibirobo all manner of skills and guide him without ever taking direct control. Any exertion drains the tiny hero's power, so as well as having to steer clear of hazards you'll need to be careful not to stray too far from a power source. An oddity, but one we'll be keeping a close eye on.

KATAMARI DAMACY

ROLLING, ROLLING, ROLLING…

Format:	PlayStation2
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Namco
Developer:	In-House
Release:	TBC
Genre:	Puzzle
Players:	1

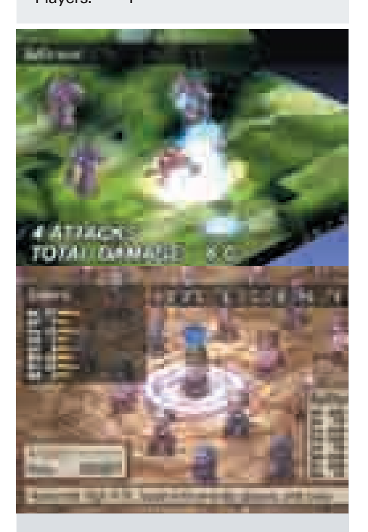
Just when you thought gaming was falling into a downwards spiral of sequels and licences, along comes the most novel of ideas – take control of a spherical being and roll around a level, assimilating and collecting anything you find. Naturally, this leads to the typical cartoon snowball effect, and as your ball of doom grows in size it becomes able to pick up bigger, heavier objects. Exactly what this achieves is currently unclear, but we'd say it was safe to rest assured that Namco will pull out all the stops when it comes to quirkiness. This is the firm that brought us *Mr Driller* and *Hachiemon*, after all, so we're pretty sure they know what they're doing…



DISGAEA: HOUR OF DARKNESS

YOU THOUGHT UNLIMITED SAGA WAS CONFUSING…?

Format:	PlayStation2
Origin:	Japan
Publisher:	Atlus
Developer:	Nippon Ichi
Release:	TBC
Genre:	RPG
Players:	1



Coming from those stat-loving chaps who brought us *Tactics Ogre*, this dark horse is desperately vying to steal the thunder of every hard-core RPG going. Trashing just about every established RPG principle from the word go, *Disgaea* taunts the humble player with character levels and attack damage that hit five figures, hundreds of varied classes and some of the most complex rules both in and out of battle that the gaming world will ever know. The curious thing is how the game manages to remain playable and, moreover, enjoyable through the sea of figures but it does just that. Expect more on this slice of number-crunching goodness in the near future.

WRC3

IT'S NOT SO EXTREME THIS TIME

Format:	PlayStation2
Origin:	US
Publisher:	SCEE
Developer:	Evolution Studios
Release:	November '04
Genre:	Driving
Players:	1-4

Licensing is a powerful tool, but Sony, on the other hand, is no tool and knows just how to use this in its favour. With the FIA World Rally Championship joining Formula One in Sony's cosy licensing bed, racing fans won't get an official re-creation of their favourite motorsport on anything other than a Sony console. Not content with this safety blanket, Evolution Studios has gone above and beyond the call of duty to make this the perfect accompaniment to the sport, offering real cars and tracks as well as predicted future models and prototypes. All well and good, but does Colin have grounds to worry? All will be revealed when *WRC3* hits shelves soon.




HIGH SCORE
2592020
SCORE
394010
10000
CRIMINALS HERE!



Bad boys, bad boys… watcha gonna do? **Chase HQ Arcade [Taito] 1988**



DOES EXACTLY WHAT IT SAYS ON THE TIN

NEW IDEAS FALL INTO THE BARGAIN BINS WHILE AGEING FRANCHISES LIGHT UP THE CHARTS. GAMES™ INVESTIGATES THIS WORRYING TREND…

One glance – that's all it takes. At any given time, a quick look down a sales chart or release list serves up more numbers, subheadings and familiar titles with every passing month. Is this a sign of stagnation in the industry? Has button pressing finally burnt its fuse? Far from it – gaming has changed. Your average Joe wants names he can trust, he wants to play the sports he watches and drive cars he recognises. This year's E3 saw the most sequels in the history of the show, and with few exceptions the games that left the media hordes salivating were updates to familiar brands. Be it *Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater*, *Halo 2* or *Half-Life 2*, the sequel brigade was out in full force in Los Angeles and no matter how good they were, the likes of *Beyond Good & Evil* and *S.T.A.L.K.E.R.* never stood a chance. Eyebrows were raised. Questions were asked. One question in particular was, quite simply, why?

FAMILIARITY BREEDS CONTEMPT

It would be all too easy to look down on the situation and lay the blame squarely on the faceless corporate machine. It seems no-one is taking any chances. Not the developers, not the publishers and, from the titles listed above, the hardware companies certainly aren't either. Even in Japan, the top ten most wanted games at the time of going to press are all follow-ups of some kind. But did you ever consider that it could actually be just as much your fault as it is theirs? If you've ever opted for a familiar brand over a similar unknown quantity without batting an eyelid (we're sure most gamers will have done so at some point) then perhaps you can see the predicament of the development teams. It's not that they don't want to take any risks, more that they can't afford to. "Titles like *Ico*, *Rez* and *Pikmin* represent niche targets within gaming genres," explains Jonathan Rooke, marketing manager for Vivendi Universal. "Gamers are quite happy to shell out £40 for a sequel to a game they know as opposed to a new and innovative title." Name recognition is tempting to both the developer and consumer. It's safer. Safer for the person sitting in front of a computer screen modelling a character late into the night, and safer for the person eyeing up the shelves deciding on their next purchase. Should I risk a mistake or go for a standard stealth-'em-up? Worry whether I'll like it or choose Generic Racer C? The answer for the cost-conscious (but arguably ill-informed) consumer is obvious.

ON THE RIGHT TRACK

The Dreamcast had some of the freshest, most unique content to grace Western shores during its painfully short lifespan. *Crazy Taxi, Space*


MEDAL OF HONOR RISING SUN
SONIC THE HEDGEHOG
PlayStation.2
バーチャファイター
9"771478"588000"
2Le

Channel 5 and *Rez* all did things no one had seen before, *Jet Set Radio* wreaked havoc with the games-art divide and *Shenmue* invented a genre whilst pushing the technical envelope farther than anything of its generation. Unfortunately, playability may be one thing but marketability is quite another, as Steve Marks, PR and marketing manager for Koei Ltd, points out. "A healthy marketing budget can help raise awareness of a title," he explains, "But you can throw money at an original game and see no return." Which brings us nicely onto *Shenmue*, a poignant case for SEGA. Millions of dollars of funding, thousands of man hours, years of development and even more years of planning put into one of the most expensive projects ever created. With Yu Suzuki, a sure-fire hit creator with a string of successes to his name, at the helm and SEGA's backing, what could go wrong? Everything, apparently. Sales were far from the figures expected of the title and the game that was destined to change SEGA's future did just that, but not quite in the way it had hoped. The truth is that the game was a severe blow to the Japanese giant, much more than just financially. Its sequel, the most imported game in history, fared even worse at retail, the Xbox port worse still, despite a slew of positive reviews and enormous amounts of funding, both in development and marketing. The dream was over.

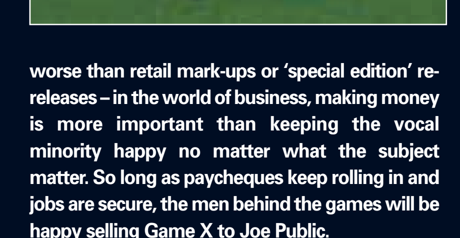
THE POWER OF THE POUND

So who's ultimately to blame? Is it the publishers who keep making sequels or the consumers who keep buying them? Welcome back to the famous chicken-egg scenario. Publishers are only releasing the type of games that perform well at retail but as gaming continues to become more mainstream, more 'casual gamers' (we use the term with the least snobbery possible) will buy into franchises they trust. Can you really fault game developers for trying to capitalise on this trend and earn a living? Jon Rooke is quick to defend the 'accused'. "Every industry must react to consumer demand or run the risk of losing sales," he points out, a sentiment shared by Steve Marks. "The benefits to the publisher are massive. If the game engine already exists and is successful, development costs are minimal and therefore return on the investment is huge." As mercenary as this attitude may sound, it's no worse than retail mark-ups or 'special edition' re-releases – in the world of business, making money is more important than keeping the vocal minority happy no matter what the subject matter. So long as paycheques keep rolling in and jobs are secure, the men behind the games will be happy selling Game X to Joe Public.

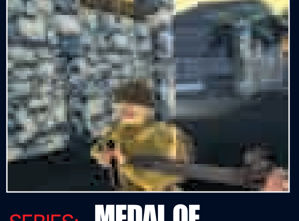


It's not all doom and gloom, of course. Titles like *Billy Hatcher* are keeping our faith in originality alive.





And so we come back to Joe. The epitome of the casual gamer, he exists in the majority. He sways consumer opinion like a tornado, has the buying power to sell inferior software and is the reason original games are a declining business. You see, Joe is new to gaming. He buys whatever he sees from other media transferred into the gaming sub-stream and then uses a coupon to buy its sequel. He sees crime on the news and buys a crime game. A war goes on, tears through the headlines for a few months and his collection receives a war game of the same name. A blockbuster movie comes out riding the hype train to hell and back and stores are filled with a rushed multi-platform atrocity that outsells bread – straight in to Joe's collection before he's even seen the film. "The casual gamer doesn't have £40 a month to spend on the latest release," Rooke points out. "They may only buy one or two games a year so when they make that purchasing decision, they want something they know will give them value for money." The fact is there are more people turning heads to film conversions than truly unique software ventures. More turning heads to games with numbers, than to games without, more looking for screenshots of the new *Gran Turismo* than they are to *Geist*. Worse still, nothing is changing.



SERIES: MEDAL OF HONOR / LATEST TITLE: MEDAL OF HONOR: RISING SUN

Now a yearly franchise (apart from the number tag). EA's once original concept is now being stretched over to the Pacific, along with its PC counterpart, the aptly named *Pacific Assault*. Part two comes out next year.

LEARN FROM PAST MISTAKES

Of course, it wasn't always this way. There was a time when fresh content co-existed with the tried-and-tested sequel, each doing as well as one another provided they were genuinely good games. Enter once again the stereotypical arch-villain – sporting a wiry handlebar moustache, a dashing monocle and an evil cackle, there something a little different about this bad guy… he's a grey cuboid known simply as PlayStation.



SERIES: **FIFA FOOTBALL / LATEST TITLE: FIFA FOOTBALL 2004**

One of the longest running of them all. Every year for the past decade, at least one new *FIFA* game has come out in time for the new season. The technology may have evolved, but the game is still playing catch-up.

SERIES: **FINAL FANTASY / LATEST TITLE: FINAL FANTASY X-2**

One of the few that has actually evolved over its run, Square-Enix's ever popular RPG has spawned more instalments, spin-offs and remakes than most would care to count. One day it really will be final…

SERIES: **STREET FIGHTER / LATEST TITLE: STREET FIGHTER EX3**

With all the *Zeros*, *Turbos*, *Alphas* and *Exes*, most of us just lost track after *Street Fighter II*. The series goes on, though it's doubtful if it'll reach the success of the originals, no matter how many more Capcom make.

"GAMERS ARE QUITE HAPPY TO SHELL OUT £40 FOR A SEQUEL TO A GAME THEY KNOW AS OPPOSED TO A NEW AND INNOVATIVE TITLE"



WHAT THE PUBLISHERS ARE DOING: SEGA

SEGA was one of the few major videogame publishers to put the creative desires of its development studios ahead of financial reasoning time after time. Until recently, that is.

With the Mega Drive and Saturn, the company constantly pushed the artistic boundaries, while the success of series such as *Sonic The Hedgehog*, *Virtua Fighter* and *Daytona USA* raised funds with which the necessary research and development of innovative game ideas could be paid for. This tends to be the way that many film companies and musicians work – by producing something they know will sell to the masses so they can raise money to put into more artistic and personal, though perhaps less commercial, ventures.

Unfortunately, in later years a combination of poor arcade sales, a hiatus in the *Sonic* series during the 32-bit era, Sony's domination of the home market, and a number of failed hardware attempts meant that SEGA's funds began to dry up. And although originality was still evident in many of the company's Dreamcast creations, by the time PlayStation2 arrived SEGA's financial situation had hit an all-time low and it was forced to pull out of the hardware market entirely, instead focusing all of its attention on multiformat software releases.

Interestingly, despite such unique games as *Super Monkey Ball*, *Jet Set Radio Future* and *Derby Owners Club* being launched over the past couple of years, it's been the GameCube translation of *Sonic Adventure 2* and the PlayStation2 version of *Virtua Fighter 4* (published by Sony) that have generated the most revenue for the company.

WHAT THE PUBLISHERS ARE DOING: EA

EA's game releases tend to split the gaming community down the middle. For casual players, the likes of *FIFA* and *Harry Potter* are just the kind of games they're looking for, while many hard-core gamers see the sheer number of sequels, franchises and movie tie-ins as nothing more than pointless cash-ins. Even rival publishers have conflicting views about the subject.

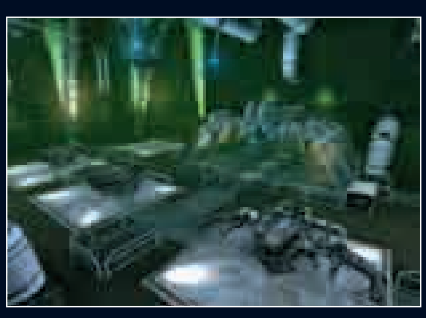
For instance, Nalin Sharma, CEO of PuzzleKings (the company behind *ZooCube*), feels that the time and effort used creating such titles could be better used bringing a little originality to the market. He quite openly says, "I would like to see Electronic Arts put something back into the creative good of the industry by way of sponsoring new ideas. Currently they are experts at maximising the revenue from franchises, but what will they do when the five-year revenue per franchise dries up?" If history is anything to go by we expect EA to simply buy into future trends as and when its current franchises do stop being so successful.

Ubi Soft's Faye O'Donohue makes an interesting point about bringing sequels and franchises to the market, as opposed to brand new titles. "It's much more difficult to publicise an unknown game – you need more time to build hype and for people to become familiar with the story, characters and so on," she says. "There is no loyal fan base, no consumer recognition," she adds. For that reason alone it's not difficult to see why some companies take popular franchises and bleed them dry.

In yet another 'cause and effect' situation, the same machine that propelled videogames onto the world stage did so at a price. Countless games flooded shelves with sequels following those that proved popular, but all the while the sheer amount of software on offer meant there was also something different and original tucked away behind that battered copy of *FIFA '96*.

With the rise of the Sony console, our friend Joe was born unto this world, but can sequelitis be attributed to this widespread appeal? Head of *ZooCube* creators Puzzle Kings, Nalin Sharma believes quite the opposite. "In my view, it's the hard-core gamers that seem to want sequels because they want better versions of what they had before," he states, adding "The casual gamer has rather caused an increase in movie licences – [they think] 'I've seen the film so the game's got to be good'." As is now obvious, the PlayStation has changed modern gaming both for better and for worse, but most importantly (for the purpose of this article, at least) has led us to situation we're facing today…

The host of sequels and expanding franchises is as much the fault of gamers as developers, with familiar titles outselling new ones.



BUT ON THE BRIGHT SIDE..

However you look at it, the plague of sequelitis sweeping the industry is not without its merits. Where movie sequels often fall short of expectations, game sequels often improve upon the original product – an important difference in the media. A financial success means more money, more people and more resources, all to be injected back into the development teams to make something else, something new. SEGA, for instance, puts out numerous sequels and updates which, in turn, fund its riskier ventures – you only have to look at its line-up to know it can't possibly expect a return on some of its quirkier titles. They're just keeping the industry breathing, the way it should be. Unfortunately, it doesn't really matter what we as gamers want. It's what Joe wants, and he only leaves us with one question. How long can the public possibly continue to buy into the same game with a different number tacked on the end? It's a worry that's ever-present for developers as well. "Long-running franchises can suffer fatigue – even the best," explains Tim Ponting, Activision's PR manager. "We were acutely aware that *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 5* was not an option which is why the rulebook went out the window and *Tony Hawk's Underground* was born." So while some firms will continue to bang out the same game year after year, it's refreshing to know that many aren't so cynical in their follow-ups. But one thing is for sure – the situation shows no signs of changing any time soon.

In the meantime, be an exception to the rule. Get out there and try something different. You never know, you might be surprised. And it might even get a sequel…

JET SET RADIO

This title pioneered videogame cel-shading but was so niche it appealed to a privileged few. The street skating, graffiti parading and grinding antics that made a name for Smilebit did precious little for its finances.

ICO

Quirky, unique and imaginative – escapism reinvented. Despite worldwide critical acclaim, the game's commercial success was limited and while few copies were sold, most will have been thoroughly enjoyed.

PIKMIN

A sound title with a couple of oft-raised flaws, poor marketability didn't help Captain Olimar's cause. A problem which Nintendo is clearly addressing for the 2004 sequel, which sees the return of the strange, brightly coloured Pikmin.

REZ

Rail shooting that reacts to music. Vivid, immersive and oh-so-different, *Rez* has a huge cult following among those lucky enough to own it. As you'd expect, though, while praise was high, sales were low.



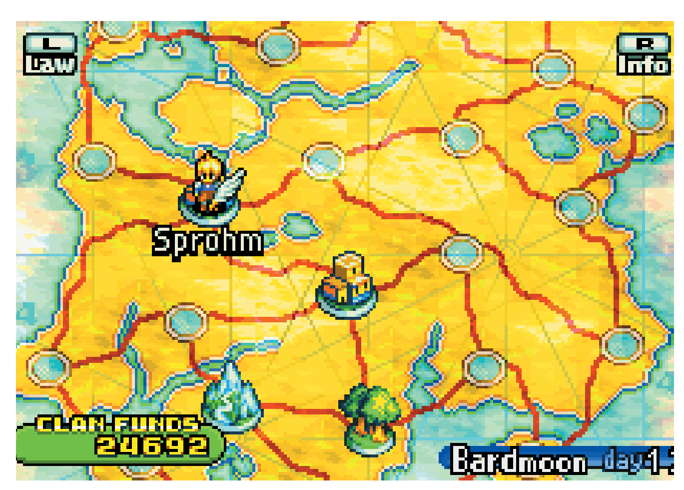
It's a big adventure on a small machine. Can the GBA's *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance* keep RPG fans happy on the move? We think so.



REVIEWS

THE AVERAGE

Despite representing an industry in which high scores mean everything, **games™** is not a magazine that marks with the majority. A lot of people think that anything below 7 (7.0, 70%, whatever) is a bad score – we don't. Going on a scale of one to ten, five is the average – average being a game that does what it sets out to do without attempting to do it better than anyone else. If a game gets five, you'll get some enjoyment out of it but nothing more, simple as that. What's more, we won't be swayed by PR people telling us what a game's like. We only decide once we've played each game to death and, in the majority of cases, to completion. If a game's bad, we'll make sure you know, if it's great, we'll sing its praises. At the end of the day, we're just here to help you decide what's worth your hard-earned cash. After all, if it wasn't for you, we'd be out of a job.



At certain points, you get to place new locations on the map yourself – much like in *Legend Of Mana*, another Square title we PAL gamers missed out on. There's no justice…



Nobody seems to know why, but the Moogles in this tactical world are more like rabbits than cats. Genetic engineering? Something in the water? Either way, it's pretty strange.

TAKING TURNS TO KILL EACH OTHER CAN BE SO MUCH FUN

FINAL FANTASY: TACTICS

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
Square Enix

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
24 October

PLAYERS
1-2

TACTICS OGRE: THE KNIGHT OF LODIS



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



ADVANCE WARS 2: BLACK HOLE RISING

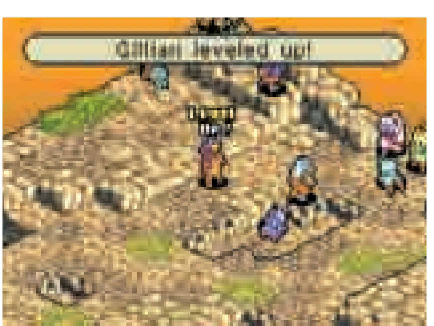
It never made it as far as UK game shops, but *Final Fantasy Tactics* is still a hard act to follow. Square has proved its tactical gaming prowess many times – *Front Mission*, the original *Tactics* and even *Parasite Eve* showcased a level of proficiency seldom seen – but word of a handheld version of one of the best *Final Fantasy* games did funny things to us, things certainly not helped by a healthy taster of the title at this year's E3 show. After what seems like months (most likely because it is months), the game has finally become available and, more importantly, accessible to those of us whose grasp of Japanese is slim. Cue countless quips at the expense of spiky-haired angst-ridden teen heroes and more gaming clichés than you can shake a Stick of Significant Pointing +3 at. But we don't care, because *Final Fantasy* has come back home to Nintendo.

First impressions are all important and, at a glance, *Tactics* is nothing short of stunning. From the wonderful sprites and animation to lavish backdrops and soundtrack, not one aspect of the game's presentation disappoints. Lasting appeal is, of course, equally important, especially with potentially over a hundred hours of gameplay on offer, but *FFTA* always comes up smelling of roses. The only aspect that grows weaker with extended play is the audio, with the same (admittedly excellent) tunes reprised time and time again on maps and in battles. A fairly minor gripe, granted, but one that does annoy more than you may think during extended play. That said, *FFTA* manages one feat that precious few strategy games can boast – it is consistently fun to play.

The obvious comparisons to its big brother will be unavoidable, but despite being of the same family the two games are surprisingly different. Aside from the judicial system employed in each area to promote variety in battles, the main difference is that of story – an area, and possibly the only one, where this game is eclipsed by its



The mounted guy on the right is the Judge – abuse the rules of the arena and you can expect an overly harsh penalty from him.



Levelling up your characters will grant access to a whole world of new classes, complete with improved skills and stats.

FAQs

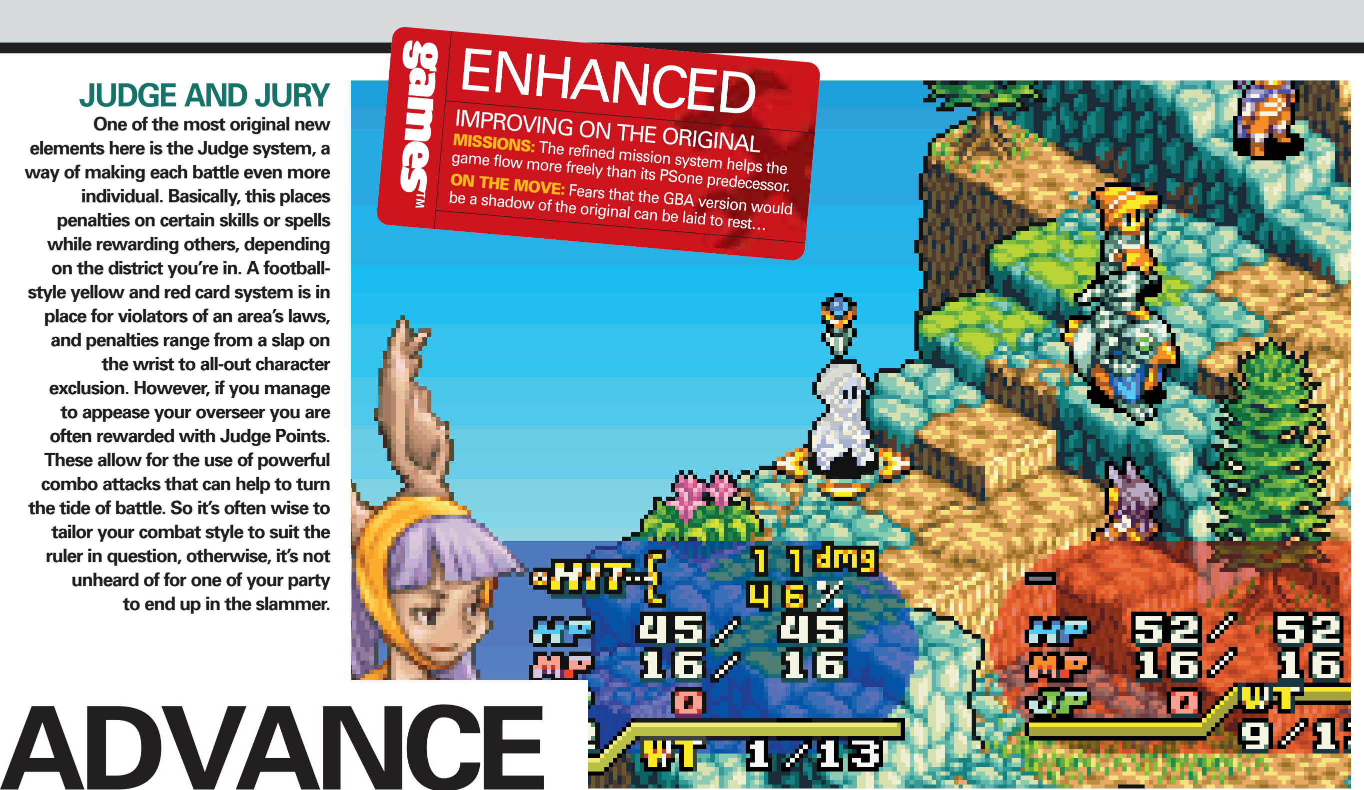
Q. HOW MANY MISSIONS?
Three hundred quests in all, but chances are you won't complete them all on your first try. Or your second, for that matter.

Q. TOO CONFUSING?
While RPG virgins may have a little trouble, the game eases you into its many rules brilliantly.

Q. DISPLAY MODES?
Three of them. In the first feature of its kind, tones and colours can be tweaked to suit either model of GBA or even the GBA Player.

JUDGE AND JURY

One of the most original new elements here is the Judge system, a way of making each battle even more individual. Basically, this places penalties on certain skills or spells while rewarding others, depending on the district you're in. A football-style yellow and red card system is in place for violators of an area's laws, and penalties range from a slap on the wrist to all-out character exclusion. However, if you manage to appease your overseer you are often rewarded with Judge Points. These allow for the use of powerful combo attacks that can help to turn the tide of battle. So it's often wise to tailor your combat style to suit the ruler in question, otherwise, it's not unheard of for one of your party to end up in the slammer.



games™ ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

MISSIONS: The refined mission system helps the game flow more freely than its PSone predecessor.

ON THE MOVE: Fears that the GBA version would be a shadow of the original can be laid to rest…

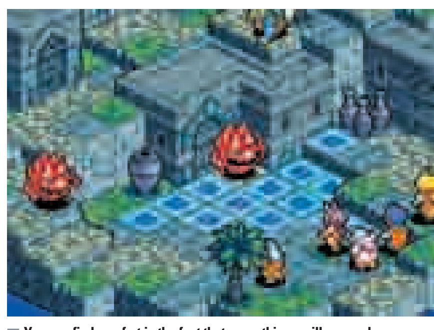
ADVANCE



Setting up your entire Clan can feel a little clunky but this is hardly surprising given the limited number of buttons available.



A car? In a *Final Fantasy* game? Not something you see every day, but the fairy tale story is quite removed from the usual *FF* fare.



You can find comfort in the fact that some things will never change. Bombs still explode when aggravated. No, wait, that's a bad thing…

predecessor. Where the PSone game had a fairly complex and deep narrative, *Advance*'s plot is much more like what you'd expect on a Nintendo handheld. Aside from its clichéd simplicity, the big problem is that although the entire game is mission-based, it's never clear which missions will advance the story and which are merely frivolous treasure hunts. It's not all changes for the worst, though, as all-human parties are now a thing of the past. Five races are available (including Moogles but not Chocobos, strangely), each of which differ statistically as well as having different professions open to them. You'll need a good mix of species and classes if you want to beat the laws of the land.

The new law system is an interesting addition but may find as many enemies as it does fans. Like Capcom's restrictions on dragon usage in *Breath Of Fire V*, these rules do help to alleviate an over-reliance on certain spells or classes – no bad thing by us. The newly reworked game balance does a similar task, promoting better use of the individual traits of classes, rather than repeatedly selecting 'Fight' – yet another commendable move. The inspired additions don't stop there. How about the multiplayer mode featuring both competitive and co-operative options? Can we tempt you with three hundred different missions perhaps? A deceptively deep array of jobs, items and magic maybe? *FFTA* may be more a parallel title to the PSone game than a true sequel but that doesn't mean it can't borrow and build upon the original's well-laid foundations, which it does with aplomb.

We're used to consoles receiving influxes of certain types of game – just look at the number of volleyball games that followed the release of *Dead Or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball* – but such bandwagon jumpers are usually characterised by their mediocrity. The recent glut of portable strategy titles couldn't be further from this stereotype, though. We've seen a few titles now that give even their home console rivals something to worry about. It could be argued that *FFTA* can be a little sluggish, or that the frequent 'random encounters' (which come by way of clashes with other Clans) can get rather frustrating, and even that the game can be too easy at times. But while these things can annoy, they never even come close to ruining the game. If forthcoming titles like *Fire Emblem* turn out anywhere near as polished as this, we'll only have our incredibly high luck statistic to thank. And Square Enix and Nintendo, of course…

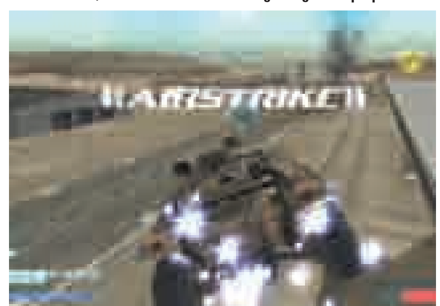
VERDICT 8/10

AN EPIC AND ACCOMPLISHED TACTICAL ADVENTURE

Whatever the terrain or the conditions, *Hardware* still manages to deliver some good old-fashioned blasting action.



Airstrikes can be called in on the Area 51 map by picking up a specific icon. Grab it, then take cover because it's gonna get hot up top…





DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
UK

PUBLISHER
Sony

DEVELOPER
London Studio

PRICE
£24.99 (£39.99 with Network Adaptor)

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1 (1-16 Online)

SONY RENEWS ITS ASSAULT UPON THE ONLINE DOMINATION OF XBOX

HARDWARE: ONLINE ARENA

There aren't many budget titles that can boast the development time of *Hardware*. First unveiled to a salivating gaming press way back at E3 2002, *Hardware* had been a work in progress for some time even then. In the 18 months since, though, London Studio has been hard at work building and perfecting the maps, adding more (and better detailed) vehicles, balancing the weapons and basically getting everything 'just right'. The result is a game that wouldn't go down at all badly with a £40 price tag, so at just under £25 it's not to be sniffed at if you're lucky enough to have broadband.

Assuming that you know by now how the front-end of an online game work then getting started couldn't be easier. Once you reach the *Hardware* 'garage' you pick from eight different vehicles – each of which has its own strengths and weaknesses – and then the game begins, at which point you can pretty much let instinct take over. Each of the five different arenas (Mayan City, Arctic Research Base, Ruins, Quarry and Area 51) is packed with ramps, obstacles, tunnels and various themed structures, which you can drive into, under, over and around. Every map is also liberally dotted with numerous weapon pick-ups (nine different sorts in all) plus the obligatory health and armour





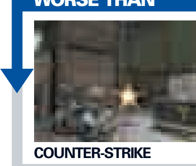
You pick either a Jeep or a Tank. Both have strengths and weaknesses so you'll get a fair fight.

DESTRUCTION DERBY ARENA

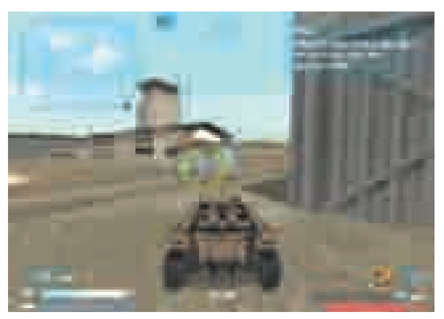


BETTER THAN

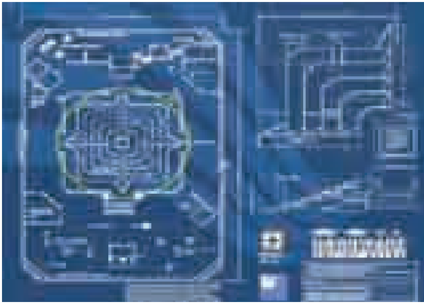
WORSE THAN



COUNTER-STRIKE



Keeping tabs on who you're obliterating is just one of the perks of online play, especially when you're using the headset as well.



Picking the right arena can help give you the edge if you know your way around – practice makes perfect, after all…

TRACK AND WHEELS

Of the eight different vehicles in the game, each falls into one of two categories: Tank or Jeep. Vehicle specs obviously differ within the categories but, generally, Tanks are slower than Jeeps but have better armour, plus they have a more powerful primary weapon but it takes longer to reload. Tanks can also turn on the spot, which helps counter their lack of speed. Often in games like this, one vehicle will be the best choice with the result that players just stick with the same one. In *Hardware*, however, a lot of work went into balancing the vehicles so that each one is potentially a game-winner.



FAQs

Q. HOW ACCESSIBLE?
It's a piece of cake to get into, but if you're lacking broadband then there's little point in playing.

Q. ANY VARIETY?
Online, you've got either individual or team versions of Deathmatch and King Of The Hill. Once you log on, it's very difficult to log off again…

Q. BIGGEST PLUS?
Sheer addictiveness. Unlike *SOCOM*, for example, if you die, you're straight back in, so you'll always be right in the thick of the action.



Rockets fire in a spread pattern of five, which means they're good for taking on a group of vehicles or for hammering just one at close range.

collectables, the use of which is what really makes the difference between winning and losing.

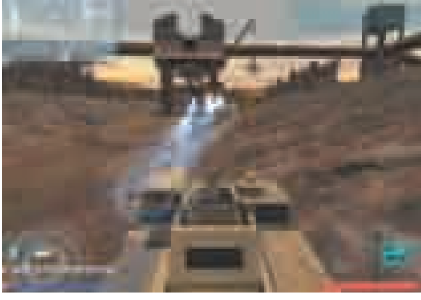
With up to 16 players on the map at any one time, London Studio has worked hard to ensure slowdown is minimal, although you may notice the odd 'teleportation' in a particularly busy game if a player's ping rate isn't quite what it should be. The same goes for clipping – on the whole you won't notice many problems, but as vehicles in the game get bashed, rammed, flipped and hurled into the air at regular intervals, it's inevitable that you're going to spot the odd bit of collision with the scenery, albeit not usually to the detriment of the gameplay.

Just as the action is pretty brainless, so the modes on offer are as obvious as they come, with a choice of Deathmatch or King Of The Hill in either team or individual situations. With the basic idea being to race around, find the enemy and blast them before they get you (whatever mode you're playing in), it really couldn't be simpler. But mastering *Hardware* requires more than a little thought. Simply storming around shooting things might work against inexperienced players, but it soon becomes important to know which weapons do what and which vehicle is best for each type of game. There's also the option of a more complex control system which allows direct control of the turret on your vehicle, and thus allows you to move one way while firing another – something that really requires two brains to do properly in the heat of battle.

Of course, when someone creates a game as simple as this it's either fun from the outset, or it's not. Thankfully, this is fun. However, the big minus point is that it's not enjoyable on your own. Sony has even gone so far as to describe the offline option as a 'training' mode. Although the gameplay is identical to the main game, taking away the human element subtracts a lot of *Hardware*'s appeal. (Maybe it's because you can't hurl insults at your fellow gamers via the USB headset.) It's not terrible, but it's something you won't go back to once you've sampled the online side.

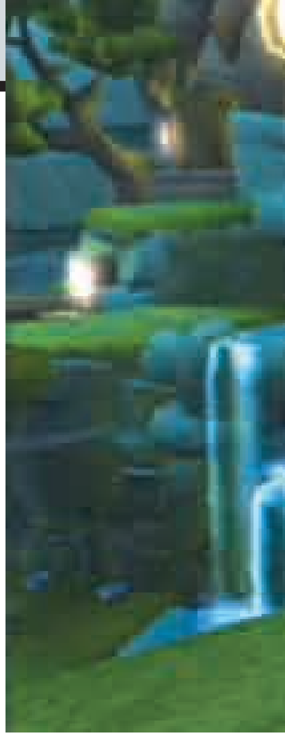
Our only other real criticism would be the ranking system. Instead of being based on kills, it takes into account the ranks of your opponents so it's possible to drop down the ranks just by getting beaten by someone new. Frustrating? You bet. But this minor quibble is the only thing that detracts from an otherwise simple yet highly addictive game. If only every online game could be this much fun.





The Plasma weapon is a devastating bit of kit if you can get a lock with it, although not quite as deadly as the Laser.





CRASH'S SUCCESSOR TRADES COLLECTING FOR SHOOTING AND VEHICLE THEFT

JAK II: RENEGADE

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
SCEE

DEVELOPER
Naughty Dog

PRICE
£39.99

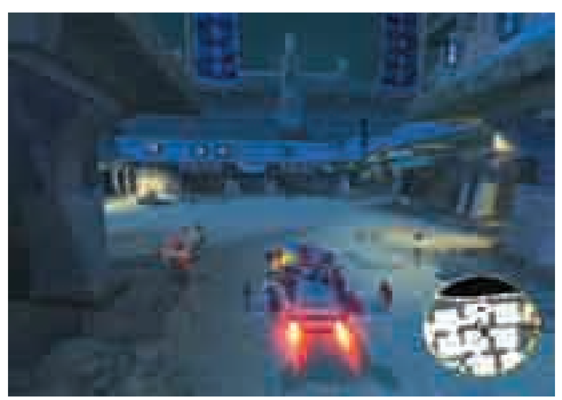
RELEASE
TBC

PLAYERS
1

Imagine a game that is all games. We're not trying to shift copies of *Haven* here so much as point out a possible eventuality. An online multiplayer world where everything is interactive, every person player-controlled and every event the result of player actions. Such potential would tear down the barriers of genre, allowing you to race, collect, kill or even dance at will, but, obviously, the development times and logistics would be a nightmare. *Jak II* doesn't even approach this ideal but it does take some tentative steps towards the conglomerate gaming dream by blending some very distinct genres.

In all honesty, a direct comparison with the first game proves very little. In terms of structure, *Jak II* owes more to the *Grand Theft Auto* series than it does to its forerunner. And now that our hero, Jak, has been tainted with deadly Dark Eco he's imbued with all manner of unholy powers. The armament of the newly enraged protagonist makes for some great new puzzles and possibilities, and the expanding, free-roaming cityscape does give ample potential for exploration, even if there really isn't that much to do outside of a few optional side quests and a whole lot of wandering. Virtually all the craft you see tearing up the skies of the futuristic environment can be procured for your own ends, each handling differently and having their own uses. Control can be somewhat tricky when in command of these and Jak's hoverboard (Naughty Dog gives extreme sports a go…), but with a little perseverance, both methods of travel can be mastered to some extent.

Those who played the first game will be pretty much prepared for the platforming sections of


Once you've commandeered a ship you'll find it only has two cruise heights, endangering either traffic or pedestrians. Damned if you do…


There's a little less collecting in this instalment, but you'll still find remnants of Precursor life lying around. The Precursor Artefacts grant Jak new abilities… for a price.

FAQs

Q. NO MORE COLLECTING?
Oh, there's still collecting to be done – there's just far less of it and you're better rewarded for your trouble.

Q. IS IT ACTUALLY FUNNY?
Yes and no. While Daxter's wit consists primarily of shouting the last word of a sentence, there are plenty of genuinely amusing moments.

Q. GUNS, YOU SAY?
Four of them, from a wide-area shotgun-type weapon to a full-on minigun that can tear through crowds.



Many of the game's settings and locations are truly wonderful, perhaps even its strongest aspect.

The giant Metal Head creature gives the universal signal for 'Help! I've been shot in the face'.



games™ ENHANCED

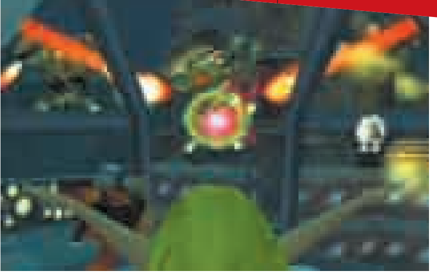
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

LOADING: With the increased area sizes it's amazing the loading times are almost non-existent.

LOOK AT ME: Characters have up to four times more polygons than in the first game. And it shows…



There's an impressive range of weapons for you to choose from, which suit the mood of the new, darker Jak.



One section sees you jumping in a gun turret to despatch huge enemies and their unborn offspring.

this sequel since, weapons aside, they play very similarly. While some sections are true to their platform roots, others now play out more like *Ratchet & Clank*, and even though the looping level design is often fairly predictable, the variety of locales and activities makes up for it. With no limit on lives or retries, you'll be battling frustration as you're forced to attempt tricky sections until you get them right – just as well really, since some of the later sections get very tough indeed both in terms of platforming and enemy neutralisation. But while we understand the need for a mix of styles, there's something about the *GTA*-cum-platform gameplay that just doesn't gel. The large-scale collecting of the last game has given way to full-on assaults and, fun as they are, without lock-on systems or first-person aiming, fighting the good fight can often be trickier than it really should.

Visually, *Jak II* is extremely accomplished, and aside from a little fade-in in the main city and the odd case of the jaggies, animation and rendering of characters and locations is superb. One of the few criticisms here is that Jak's movement can be painfully slow on foot – a good incentive to take to the sky perhaps, but annoying nonetheless. The quality presentation is continued elsewhere too, with as high a standard of voice acting as you're likely to see in any current game. This is by far the best part of the solid Pro Logic surround soundtrack, though it all serves its purpose with aplomb.

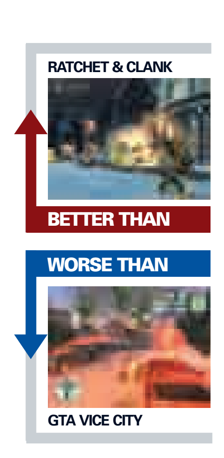
The most prominent thing about *Jak II*, though, is its substantially darker mood – it's simply isn't what you'd expect from either having played the first game or seen the starring duo. Featuring more complex subject matter and a much grittier feel than virtually every other platformer out there, Naughty Dog has fully capitalised on the popularity of 'mature' games by producing a similar title that younger players will be legally allowed to buy – no mean feat when you consider one of the game's leads is an orange rodent. Sure, it's not without fault and does feel a little confused in places, but as the platform genre evolves, Jak and Daxter give a fine performance in what is one of the better adventure games of this generation.



FINALLY – A GENRE CLASH THAT ACTUALLY WORKS

DO IT ALL

It's amazing to look at the PlayStation2's catalogue and think that after two years on the market, it still offers very few quality platformers. Far too many wannabes are so hung up on reinventing the wheel that they end up feeling stale and overly familiar before they hit the shelves. This is why we're impressed with *Jak II*'s variety even though it may not be perfectly bound together. How many other games allow you to jump around mountains, ride hoverboards, steal flying cars and blow the hell out of things in a matter of minutes, let alone do it to a respectable standard? As we've said before, Midway's *Haven: Call Of The King* made a bold claim and arguably had the right idea with its 'all games in one' theory, but it's comforting to know that there are those out there keen to learn from the mistakes of others.





The impressive visuals aren't quite as polished as they could be, but you can still expect your fair share of picture postcard moments.



The entire landscape is yours to explore, so be sure to make full use of the environment in order to gain the upper hand over your foes.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
Poland

PUBLISHER
Gathering

DEVELOPER
Techland

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1 (Up to 32 online)

MINIMUM SPEC
900MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 1.7GB HDD space, 32MB 3D graphics card

ANOTHER CONTENDER VIES FOR THE COVETED 'HALO BEATER' TAGLINE

CHROME

Review -

There are so many prom titles on our PC gaming moment that *Chrome* somehow managed to attentions until now. Polish develope joins the relatively obscure European behind the likes of *Far Cry* and *Breed* a visually spectacular tactical shooter incredible draw distances to create some breathtakingly expansive environments. Clearly drawing on genre kings *Deus Ex*, *Halo* and *Half-Life* when it comes to the action, *Chrome* certainly has all the right ingredients for gaming greatness.

As hardened mercenary Bolt Logan, you'll tour the Valkyria galaxy doing dirty work for cash and gradually becoming entangled in a corporate war over the valuable resource Chrome. The striking visuals immediately impress – the dense forests have sunlight streaming through the canopy – and the immense outdoor maps can be freely explored, giving your adventures plenty of open-ended scope and allowing full strategic exploitation of the opportunities the landscape offers. You'll find that enemies can be hard to spot ...getation and ...or settings, yet ...f shooting you to ...frighteningly long ...taying out of sight. ...counters with your foes reveal the ...strategically use their surroundings ...-ordinated attacks on your position.

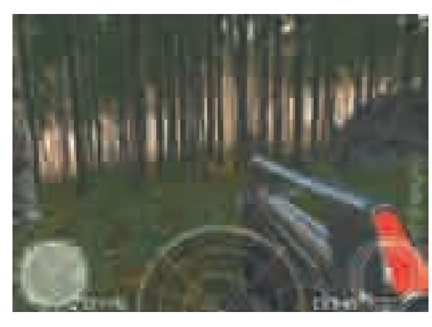
Yet after promising so much, the end result falls some way short of excellence. Virtually every aspect of the game seems to lack that final third of polish, with visuals and gameplay feeling somewhat ragged after doing so well up to a point. Similarly, while all the pieces seem to be in place to deliver something special, they never quite gel into a wholly playable experience. That's not to say *Chrome* isn't a reasonably good game, but too many inadequacies across the board prevent the action from seriously challenging the genre's big guns.

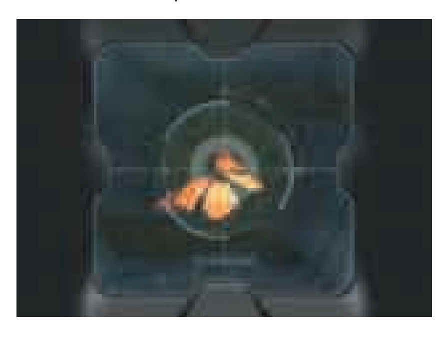
games™ GLOBAL
TAKING GAMING ONLINE
ROOM FOR ALL: The massive environments should make the 32-player online skirmishes popular.
NO SURPRISES: All the usual online game modes are available, from Deathmatch to Team Domination.

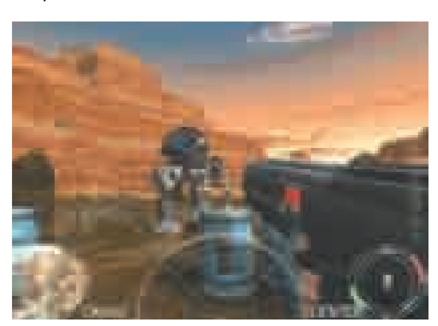


VERDICT 6/10
IMPRESSIVE TO A POINT, BUT LACKS FINESSE

To spot the enemy in dense forests you'll need a keen eye. Being a sharp shot helps too.







BOKTAI: THE SUN IS IN YOUR HAND

GARLIC, STAKES AND FACTOR 20 AT THE READY – WE'RE GOING OUTDOORS

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Konami

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Q1 '04
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

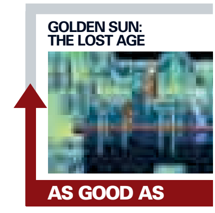
As far as gimmicks go, you can't get much more extreme than a game that forces you to go outside, especially since, as gamers, that's probably the last thing we'd want to do. But while it might sound like a punishment for pasty-faced game fans everywhere, it's a fitting concept for a handheld title focusing on the destruction of vampires. Using real sunlight to kill monsters? What will that clever Mr Kojima think of next?

The way that you play *Boktai* basically depends on when you play. A chip in the game cartridge absorbs solar energy in order to power your primary weapon, so conservation is essential when natural sunlight isn't available. What's more, the game's built-in clock regulates the danger level in specific areas – vampires stay indoors during the day but venture outside at night, so you have to adapt your playing style to the situation. Playing outside in the noonday sun allows for a more gung-ho approach to dispatching your enemies (though there's less of them to deal with), while night-time play requires a more stealthy approach.

Thankfully, there's plenty more to the gameplay than just a few gimmicks. Django (the game's hero) can enhance his weaponry as the game progresses, allowing him to solve puzzles, melt ice, put out fires and so on. After clearing the first area and rescuing a young girl called Lita, Django can also create rare items for himself by combining other more common objects and planting them in the ground. You then have to use sunlight to cultivate these plants, adding yet another twist to the action. Throw in a number of *Metal Gear Solid*-esque stealth elements and you've got a game that requires a lot more thought than you might first assume.

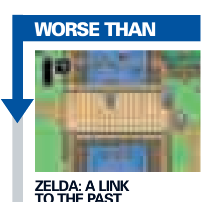
Of course, we can't help but be wary of the fact that the game requires direct sunlight in certain situations (such as destroying each Vampire Lord), as it restricts when and where you can play. However, a skilful player can negotiate much of the game without the need for sunlight (indeed, it's the only way to earn higher grades for each area) so we can't be too negative. Either way, *Boktai* is a unique and enjoyable game with plenty of flair that should keep adventure fans happy while on the move.

GOLDEN SUN: THE LOST AGE



AS GOOD AS

WORSE THAN



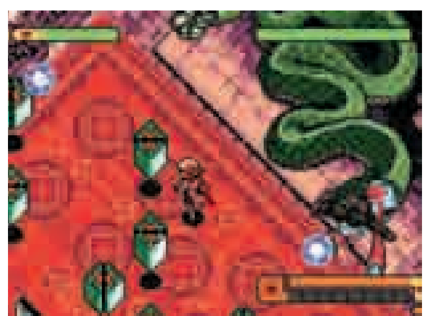
ZELDA: A LINK TO THE PAST



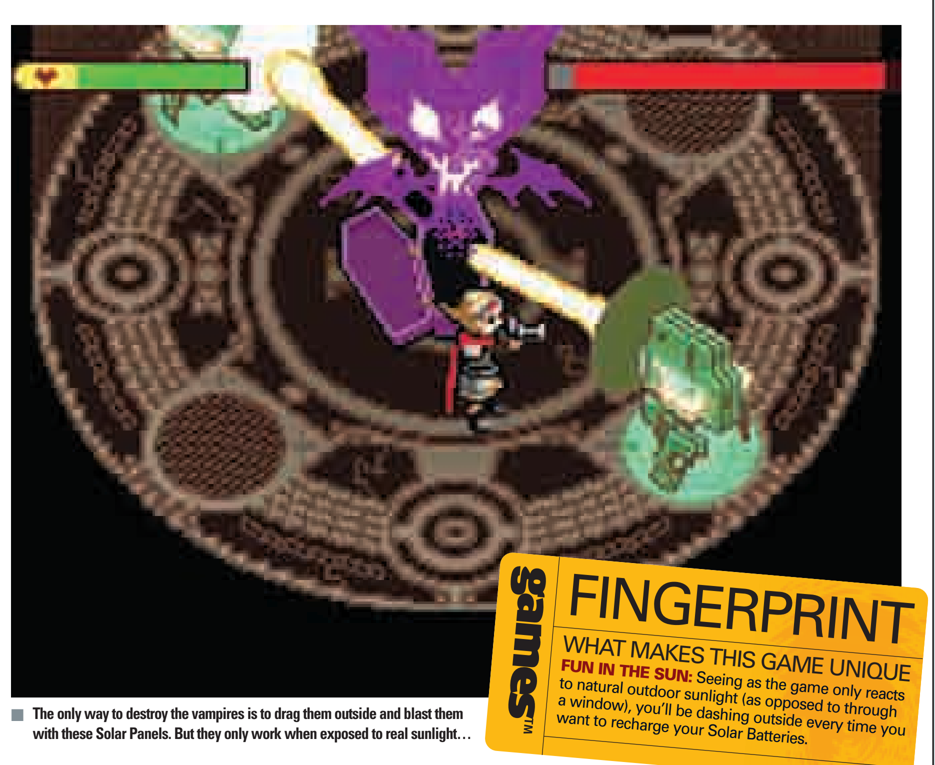
PLENTY OF DEPTH, BUT A BIT RESTRICTIVE



Solar Stations are essential if you can't get outside to recharge your weapon's batteries, though be careful not to run them dry.



Forcing a vampire into its coffin can often prove more problematic than you think – especially if you're playing at the wrong time of day.



The only way to destroy the vampires is to drag them outside and blast them with these Solar Panels. But they only work when exposed to real sunlight…

games™ FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

FUN IN THE SUN: Seeing as the game only reacts to natural outdoor sunlight (as opposed to through a window), you'll be dashing outside every time you want to recharge your Solar Batteries.



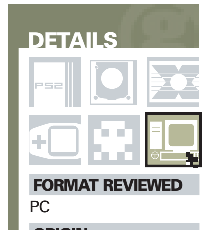


Sadly, Stormtrooper marksmanship has improved slightly since the original movie trilogy.



Other weapons are available, but why would you want them if you've got one of these?

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
LucasArts/Activision

DEVELOPER
Raven Software

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1 (Up to 16 online)

MINIMUM SPEC
450MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 1.3GB HDD space, 32MB 3D graphics card

NOW YOU CAN EXPERIENCE THE ALL-ACTION SIDE OF JEDI LIFE

JEDI KNIGHT: JEDI ACADEMY

Arguably the most alluring part of the Jedi Knight job description involves getting your hands on your very own Lightsaber. And since Kyle Katarn's last outing, *Jedi Outcast*, delivered perhaps the most fulfilling taste of Saber mastery yet seen in a videogame we were naturally eager to sample the enhancements Raven had brought to the latest instalment in the series. This time around Kyle has relinquished hero duties to concentrate on his new role as instructor at Luke Skywalker's Jedi Academy, and players step into the shoes of his promising young apprentice. As usual, the Imperial Remnant are up to no good, and on your arrival at the Academy concerns are already growing about an evil plan they appear to be hatching in collaboration with an ancient Sith cult. It seems they've discovered a way of draining the energy from particular Force hotspots around the galaxy, but before you're entrusted with crucial missions to the likes of Hoth and Darth Vader's abandoned fortress you'll have to prove yourself by undertaking a series of more menial Jedi errands.

You'll be faced with a selection of five missions set around the furthest-flung corners of the New Republic that require the special talents of a budding Jedi. The order in which you attempt these is entirely at your discretion, and on completion of the fourth assignment you'll be given the option of either progressing to the next section of the game or taking on the last remaining mission like a patient young Padawan. Expect to come across a much wider array of scenery than before as your intergalactic travels take in the usual helping of familiar haunts from the *Star Wars* universe along with a good deal of artistically

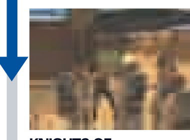
You'll catch the likes of Chewie and Boba Fett giving it some with a Lightsaber in the multiplayer parts of the game.

JEDI KNIGHT II: JEDI OUTCAST

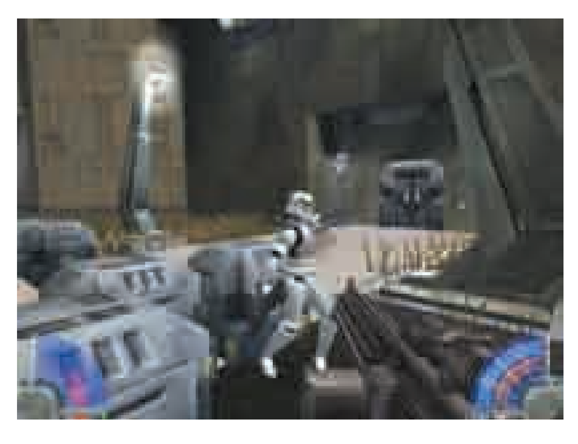


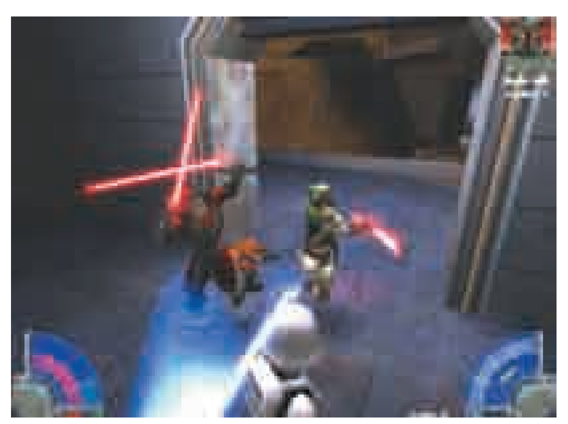
BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC





Jedi Academy proves that two heads are better than one when it comes to Lightsabers too.

games™

ENHANCED

IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

TWICE THE SLICE: Get two neon blades under your control for twice the Saber-swirling fun.

TRAVEL OPPORTUNITIES: The action takes place against a greater variety of backdrops than before.

diverse new ones. There's also a reasonable amount of variation to the gameplay content, which might see our hero taking to the saddle of a Taun-Taun or battling through the enemy hordes alongside Master 'call me Kyle' Katarn.

One of the most obvious additions to *Jedi Academy* is the ability to customise your character from the outset and subsequently shape their development as they learn to master the Force. Before enrolling in the Academy you must select your character's race, appearance and clothing, and choose a hilt and blade colour for your first Lightsaber. As soon as your training begins you'll have access to eight basic Force powers, and following the successful completion of each mission you can choose to furnish the young apprentice with additional Dark or Light Force abilities. While keeping your character on the path to becoming a true Jedi should involve only using the Force for good, it can be highly tempting to add the more aggressive Dark-side powers to your ever evolving box of Jedi tricks.

At key stages in the adventure you'll also get the chance to add new fighting styles to your repertoire, and even equip yourself with two Sabers or upgrade to the double-headed model. Indeed, it is the additional Sabers and a noticeable amount of polish to the core swashbuckling dynamics that really make the game a laudable step forward from its predecessor. In tweaking the focal element of gameplay to deliver more fluidity to the endless combination of elegant manoeuvres, *Jedi Academy* is inarguably the next best thing to wrapping your mitts around a real Lightsaber. The Jedi weapon handles blissfully and ensures the relentless combat remains compelling. There's also a nice progression to the adversaries that will stand in your path as your skills advance. Taking out several Stormtroopers with one sweeping flash of neon is a gratifying sight, but the fun really starts as more and more Saber-wielding Dark Jedi are introduced into the fray and the scene becomes awash with multiple blades.

You're rarely inclined to sheath your mighty Saber and delve into the familiar complement of guns, but doing so clearly displays how marginally the basic formula and level structure have actually evolved in the eight years since *Star Wars: Dark Forces*. Similarly, the added character customisation element essentially does little to improve on last year's *Jedi Outcast* template. Yet however shallow the action may be, for us *Jedi Academy* is all about the enhanced Lightsaber combat. Any game that allows players to recreate all the thrills of those sublimely choreographed climactic duels from the movieswith such style deserves the thumbs up from aspiring Jedi everywhere.

VERDICT 7/10

SUPERB JEDI ACTION IN A STANDARD MOULD

CELEBRITY DEATHMATCH

As you'd expect from a game based on the *Quake III* engine, the online multiplayer portion of *Jedi Academy* is delivered with panache. A highlight is the ability to kit out a few of your favourite characters with the Lightsaber of your choice and send them into the fray. There are six modes of play to keep things interesting, including new two-on-one Power Duels that will really test your Saber skills, and an objective-driven Siege scenario that allocates players specific roles within each team. Solo play is also handy for honing your Jedi skills before entering the online arena for real.

You'll bump into a number of Saber-wielding adversaries during your adventures who'll need to be shown some cunning swordsmanship.



The mighty Rancor is one of many familiar faces you'll come across on your travels, but once again it's no match for a plucky Jedi.

FAQs

Q. A LONG TIME AGO...?
The action is set shortly after the previous game, and around 15 years after the original *Star Wars* trilogy.

Q. SUCCUMB TO THE DARK SIDE?
As the adventure reaches a conclusion, the plot splits to give players either Dark- or Light-side endings depending on the choices they've made.

Q. FAMILIAR FACES?
On your adventures you'll come across the likes of Chewbacca, Boba Fett, the Rancor and many of the vehicles from the original trilogy.



■ *Hit & Run* is packed with virtually every character from the cartoon, even those you don't often see.



■ Missions include racing against people or the clock, collecting items or smashing into things.

FUSED
BRINGING GENRES TOGETHER
GTA: VICE SPRINGFIELD: It's hard to miss the obvious similarities to Rockstar's money-spinner.
MMM, SIMPSONS: The quotes get repetitive, but there's enough make most people snigger.

THE SIMPSONS: HIT & RUN

IT'S THE BEST SIMPSONS GAME FOR AGES. BUT THAT'S NOT EXACTLY DIFFICULT

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMATS
PS2, GameCube, PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Vivendi Universal

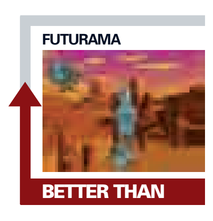
DEVELOPER
Radical Entertainment

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
11 November
(US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1-4

FUTURAMA



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

JAK II: RENEGADE

Yes, we're as shocked as you are. After having to suffer wave after wave of bad *Simpsons* games over the years (some of which bring back memories that we've since tried to repress), someone's finally managed to get something right. Of course, this all ties in with the realisation that stealing other people's ideas and then slapping the *Simpsons* licence on the top of it is the only way for the brand to succeed, but hey, you've got to start somewhere, right?

So after the dismal *Simpsons Skateboarding* (*Tony Hawk's*, but crap) and the vaguely passable effort that was *Simpsons: Road Rage* (*Crazy Taxi*, but in cartoon form), we now have *Hit & Run* – essentially *GTA3*, but with repetitive soundbites, comedy antics and Cletus the Slack-Jawed Yokel. Thankfully, this actually turns out to be one of the better settings for the *Simpsons* licence in terms of a videogame, simply because it means all the characters can be featured in a way relevant to the cartoon without having to give them tenuous reasons for being there (skateboarding? wrestling? why?).

Being a cut-down, almost children's version of *GTA*, the gameplay is as straightforward as you might expect. Each of the seven levels has you exploring a different and admittedly huge region of Springfield as one of five characters in an effort to complete set missions – finish the main ones and you can move onto the next area. Obviously, there's a smattering of hidden objectives (including a main bonus mission and several race-based tasks) but, just as obviously, the amount of scope for going around and doing your own thing is far less than that of *GTA3*. While running or driving around freely might uncover coins, things for you to destroy or even collectable cards, it's only a small matter of time before you're forced to get on with the missions.

And that's probably the game's biggest problem – there's just not enough to do besides the main tasks to justify stealing the *GTA* concept. Certainly, the use of actual *Simpsons* writers, the real actors providing the voices and the inclusion of virtually every single recognisable character, vehicle and landmark gives the game far more appeal than past games. But the distinct lack of content reduces the amount of enjoyment you'll get out of it. A definite renter, but not enough to be a keeper.

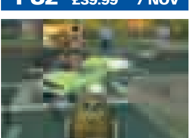


VERDICT 5/10
BETTER THAN YOU'D THINK, BUT STILL VERY BASIC

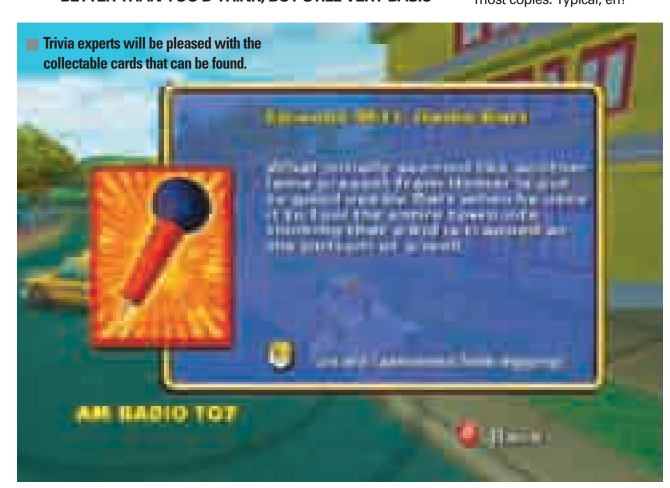
GC/PC £39.99/£34.99

Not surprisingly, both versions look more or less identical to the Xbox one, although PC owners will need a decent machine and a controller to get the same desired effect.

PS2 £39.99 7 NOV



The least attractive, with slightly more draw-in and a touch more slowdown. But given the format, it's also the one that'll definitely sell the most copies. Typical, eh?



■ Trivia experts will be pleased with the collectable cards that can be found.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Vivendi

DEVELOPER
Hudson

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Q4 '03

PLAYERS
1-2

SHOULDN'T THE RSPCA BE GETTING INVOLVED BY NOW?

BLOODY ROAR EXTREME

As fighting franchises go, it's a proven fact that Joe Public is more likely to pick up the latest instalment in a recognised series than an original title. It's hard to recall the last original beat-'em-up that was well received – the majority of today's digital brawlers have roots on PSone and earlier hardware. Despite this, there are many franchises that never really get off the ground and while there is, in some cases, good reason for this (as anyone who's played a *Toshinden* game will tell you), what went wrong with the likes of *Tobal* and *Rival Schools* remains a mystery. Similarly, Hudson's shape-shifting fighter has had a decent run thus far, and as much as we're aware that they're far from groundbreaking titles, the series has been consistently solid from the off and shows no signs of falling down now.

The game mechanics are much as you'd expect from the series – combo-by-numbers, over-the-top specials and a soundtrack with the amps turned up to 11. For all its button-mashing faults, though, *Bloody Roar* still manages to be fun, especially with two players. Unfortunately, this enjoyment doesn't last to the later stages of the game. It's not unknown for the AI to suddenly spike on the last few opponents, making for some hair-ripping encounters.

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
FURRY: Characters, especially their beastly alter egos, are more impressive than ever.
TWEAKS: Minor adjustments to the game's fundamentals make it easy to pick up and play.

It may not be the most technical beat-'em-up on the market, nor is it the most stylish, but one thing works wonders in *Bloody Roar's* favour – simplicity. Naturally, this works both ways, so while the ease of play makes the game incredibly accessible, it also leaves it open to abuse and lacking any depth. The pre-set combos and primitive mechanics may be enough for groups of *Virtua Fighter* nuts to take up torches and pitchforks and form angry mobs, but the simple truth is that it's all a matter of expectations. If you go into *Bloody Roar Extreme* hoping for the next big thing, you'll undoubtedly emerge disappointed just minutes later. If, on the other hand, you ask no more of a fighter than a few impressive effects and some enjoyable, inoffensive creature combat, *Bloody Roar* could just be worth a look.



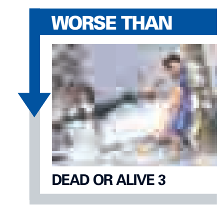
VERDICT 5/10
SHALLOW AS THEY COME BUT STILL FUN

TAO FENG: FIST OF THE LOTUS

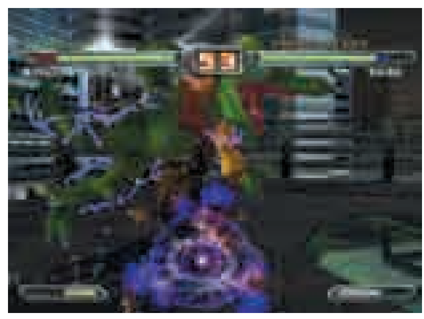


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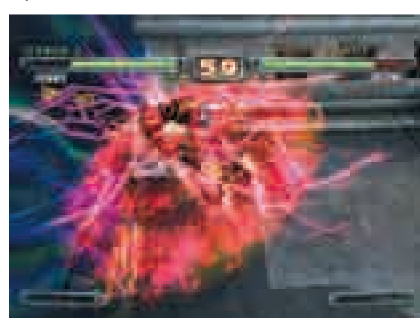
WORSE THAN



DEAD OR ALIVE 3



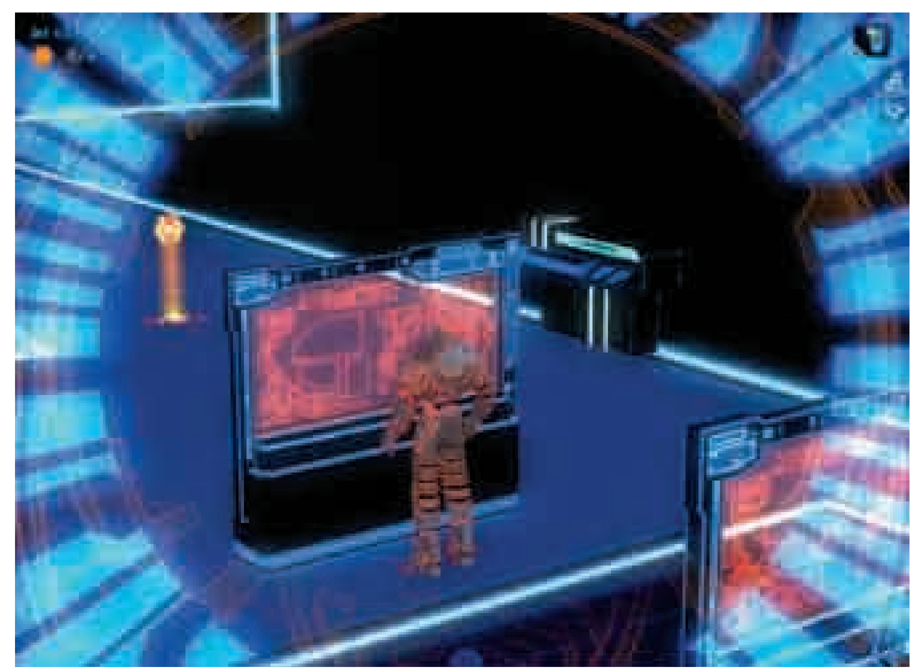
Possibly the only screenshot of a mid-air chameleon you'll see this year. Until *Pokémon Channel* comes out, that is.



As you'd expect, the Transformation Attacks trigger massive, colourful pyrotechnic displays. You know the kind by now, surely?



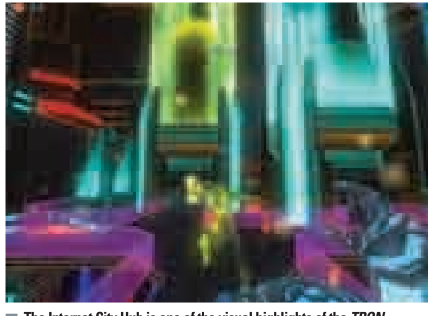
Most of the animal transformations are pretty self explanatory but we're still unsure exactly what Xion the Unborn is supposed to be. Apart from revoltingly powerful and nigh-on impossible to defeat, at least. And why exactly is a cat called a 'Half Beast'? So many questions....



Your weapons include variations on the Disc, Rod, Ball and Mesh. Our favourite incarnation of the Rod primitive has to be the LOL, which comes complete with sniper scope for those invaluable stealthy approaches.



Fans of more traditional FPS scenarios will be pleased to find an array of familiar weapon types besides your trusty Disc.



The Internet City Hub is one of the visual highlights of the *TRON* universe with its immense scale and suitably varied content.

DOES THE TRON UNIVERSE STILL HAVE WHAT IT TAKES?

TRON 2.0

It's over two decades since *TRON* hit the silver screen, and remembering the state of computer technology in 1982 reminds us just how far ahead of its time Disney's futuristic adventure really was. But when we heard of plans to recreate the *TRON* universe in a first-person shoot-'em-up, we'll admit that our interest levels ranged from indifferent to only mildly intrigued (though no doubt the news was met with rather more enthusiasm among the movie's sizeable cult following). Though the concept would undeniably offer a unique slant on the standard FPS scenario, we couldn't help wonder whether the ageing licence would present more limitations than opportunities for a game entering such a fiercely competitive genre. Brushing first impressions aside, however, we prepared to be digitised into the abstract universe of computer circuitry, with high hopes of *TRON 2.0* delivering a gaming experience that would reflect its striking visuals and our faith in Monolith's expertise.

All the action takes places in and around the corridors of cyberspace some 20 years after events depicted in the film. Players step into the shoes of Jet Bradley when he is unwittingly plunged into the digital realm of the movie following the mysterious kidnapping of his father. But before the impressively deep storyline can even begin to unravel, Jet finds himself fighting for his life against a relentless army of Intruder Countermeasure Programmes (ICPs) who believe him to be the instigator of a destructive virus threatening to corrupt the entire system.

One of the key concerns with staging the game in such an offbeat context was just how receptive the average gamer would be to the bombardment of potentially disorientating computing references they'd come across in the *TRON* universe. While hard-core *TRON* fans and those familiar with computer terminology will no doubt find themselves in metaphor heaven, the game gently introduces newcomers to all the laws and logic of life in the digital dimension. Thanks to the wonderfully engrossing game world Monolith has created, even those least acquainted with the whole *TRON* concept should quickly warm to the mindset of existing as a computer program.

Bringing the highly stylised environments to life has clearly been a labour of love for the design team. Not only does the game's dazzling aesthetic individuality evoke instant appeal, the immaculate attention to detail plays a crucial role in generating the aura of quality that runs throughout the world of *TRON*. This wholesome feel combines with gameplay dynamics of the highest order to

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Buena Vista Games

DEVELOPER
Monolith

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-16

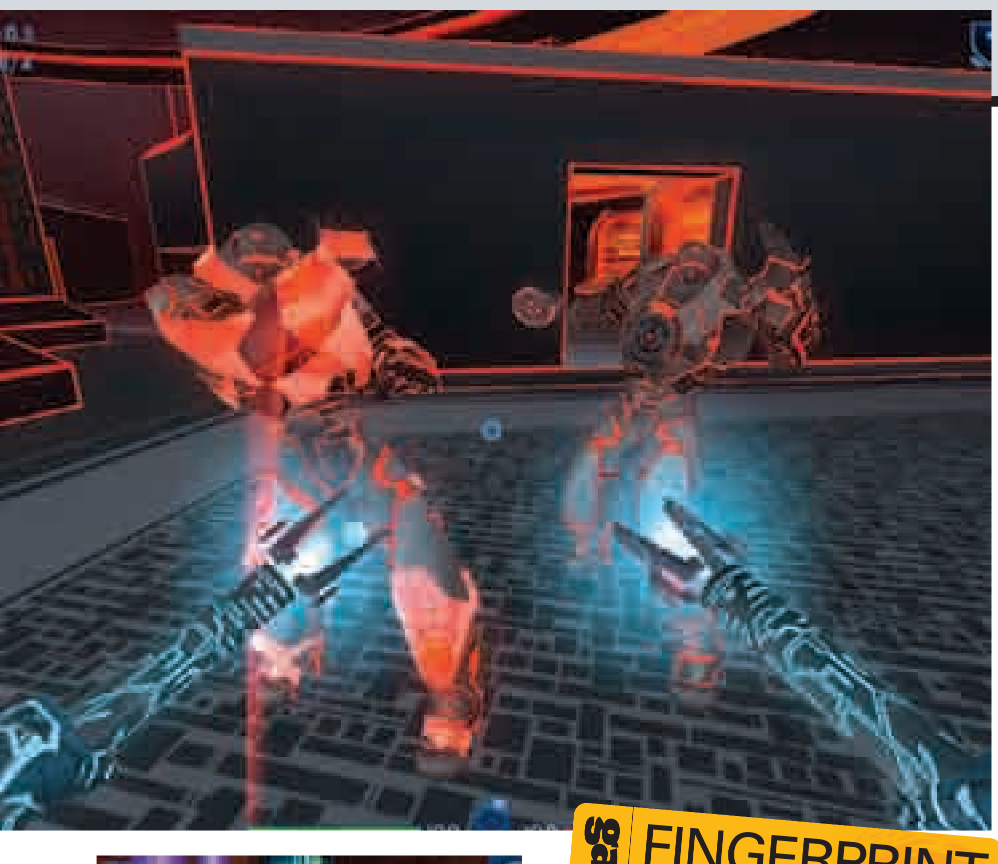
MINIMUM SPEC
500MHz processor, 256MB RAM, 2.4GB HDD space, 32MB 3D graphics card

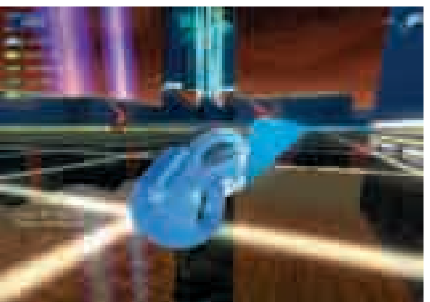
FAQs

Q. ONE FOR THE FANS?
Fans of the cult movie will rejoice at *TRON 2.0*, and anyone wanting a top-notch FPS should give this stylised concept a chance too.

Q. EPIC ADVENTURE?
The game features something like 30 levels spread over 11 missions, along with the Lightcycle and Disc Arena sub-games.

Q. HARDWARE HUNGRY?
Running the game at the highest level of detail is truly breathtaking, but cutting down the resolution doesn't dilute the experience too much.





Lightcycle contests feature at various points in the main game, and there's a separate Circuit mode for those wanting more.

immerse players in some of the most polished action to ever grace the genre.

The fulfilling combat mechanics are perhaps best appreciated by employing the traditional Disc as your weapon of choice against the hordes of ICPs, Z-lots, Resource Hogs and Data Wraiths bent on putting an end to Jet's exploits. The Disc is an invaluable tool for blocking enemy attacks and players can also influence its path during flight, adding elements of tactical depth and skilful timing to the standard point-and-shoot mentality. Three other primitive weapon types feature in the game besides the Disc, which may each be upgraded from their basic form with downloads from archive bins dotted around the game world.

The various incarnations of the Disc, Rod, Ball and Mesh primitives cover all the sniper, automatic and grenade-launching weapon types no FPS should be without, all within the inimitable *TRON* style. Jet will also be able to download a diverse selection of subroutines from the archive bins where the weapons are found in order to enhance his programmed repertoire of abilities. Management of the subroutine interface is another strategic aspect of play due to limited memory capacity, and choosing the right tools for the situation you're facing is paramount. For instance, virus protection software should be installed when battling Z-lots to prevent your subroutines from becoming infected, whilst the Fuzzy Signature is a must for sections requiring stealth.

There's a good deal of variation in gameplay – including the fabulously addictive Lightcycle contests – but inevitably most gamers' opinions of *TRON 2.0* are likely to hinge on its essentially limited theme. Whilst many may find the thought of exploring the innards of a computer system somewhat uninspiring compared with the limitless potential of a more 'real world' setting, those allowing themselves to be drawn into the abstract world of *TRON 2.0* will find the experience rich enough to compete with the very cream of the genre.

games™ FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

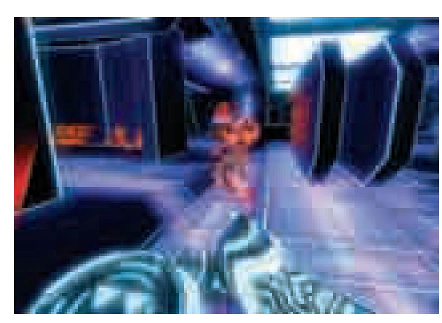
CHARACTER MODEL: Rebecca Romijn-Stamos provides the voice of Lightcycle champion Mercury.

RAISING THE BAR: At last, a game that uses a movie licence to its full potential.



ON YER BIKE

Whilst dispatching your somewhat limited range of adversaries or mingling with programs going about their routines never becomes tiresome, the Lightcycle portions of the game are nevertheless a welcome supplement to the core FPS action. A simplistic yet immensely entertaining battle of wits, the lightning-paced contests carry all the frustrating but frighteningly addictive hallmarks of retro-style gaming at its best. There's a Circuit mode Lightcycle sub-game outside the main adventure to hone your skills, but, sadly, the split-second timing involved means multiplayer contests are only possible over a LAN network due to the insufficient ping rate online. Multiplayer Disc Arena battles can be played via the web, further highlighting the skilful depth of the combat system and rounding off an impressive package of sub-games.

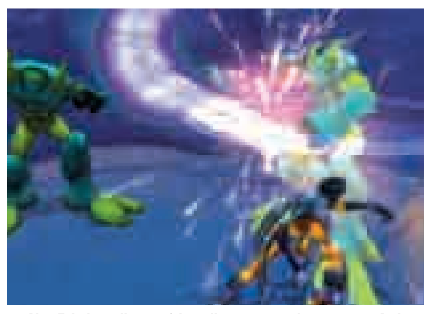


Thanks to its ability to block enemy barrages, the Disc can be a highly effective weapon in the right hands.

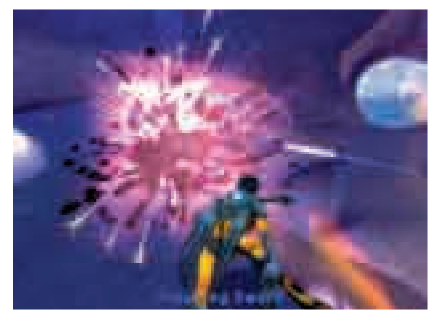


The Firewall level is a prime example of Monolith's imaginative embodiment of computer processes in the game world.





Alter Echo is easily one of the ugliest games we've ever seen. And it's a complete mess from beginning to end. Ooh, we're mean…



Nevin has a whole range of abilities with which to dispatch opponents. Unfortunately, button bashing is just as effective.



You may be able to change into three distinct forms, but they offer little benefit over the bog-standard Melee mode. Stick with that instead.

FINGERPRINT

WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE

GOT THE RHYTHM: Killing your enemies via timing is a nice idea, but it doesn't quite work here.

SHAPE SHIFTER: Changing forms is quite fun to begin with – just a shame it doesn't last.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox

OTHER FORMAT
PlayStation2

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
THQ

DEVELOPER
Outrage

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out now

PLAYERS
1

HOW MUCH PURPLE CAN ONE GAME CONTAIN?

ALTER ECHO

Every once in a while a game comes along that not only has incredible visuals and fantastic sound, but also contains amazing, in-depth gameplay and wonderful innovation. *Alter Echo* is not that game. After all the acclaim it received at E3, we were hoping for a truly gratifying arcade adventure, instead we've been given a woefully dull game that has few redeeming features.

After waking up from a particularly nasty spaceship crash, Nevin finds himself separated from his companions and in ownership of an extremely strange suit. Fashioned from an organic substance called Plast by an entity known only as Echo, Nevin's Polysuit allows him to shift between three distinct forms – Melee, Gun and Stealth. Each mode offers several unique advantages over its peers and all must eventually be used should you muster the willpower to finish the game.

Most of the time you'll be playing in Melee mode (within which Nevin has a whole range of sword attacks) and the fairly limited gameplay is initially enjoyable. But upon getting further into the game and powering up your suit with new combos, you quickly realise that it's button bashing and not finesse that will aid you in your quest. So you'll end up staying in Melee mode, mindlessly hammering away until the game forces you to morph into either Gun or Stealth form. Add to this a tacked-on rhythm-action game that supposedly enables you to alter time (in fact, it just allows you to kill enemies more quickly) and you're left with a shallow and derivative game that offers no redeeming features.

To make matters worse, *Alter Echo* features some of the most garish and, frankly, purple visuals ever to appear on a next generation console – you'd be forgiven for thinking you were looking at a high-res PlayStation title, not a state-of-the-art next-gen console. Level design is even more atrocious and simply involves Nevin running into a cavern, killing some monsters and then leaving. Hardly cutting edge. You may occasionally have to use your various forms to complete slightly more complex puzzles, but ultimately it just feels like a lost opportunity. *Alter Echo*'s boring, seen-it-all-before gameplay, sloppy combat and truly dreadful visuals combine to create a game that's not worth renting, let alone the £40 to buy it.

VERDICT 3/10
LACKING IN PRACTICALLY EVERY DEPARTMENT

PS2 £35.99 OUT NOW



Although PS2 *Alter Echo* is £5 cheaper than its Xbox peer, it has even worse visuals. The game does seem to have been created with the dual shock controller in mind, but titles like this are ten-a-penny on the PS2 nowadays.

VEXX



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

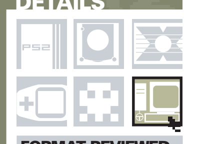


LEGACY OF KAIN

ALL ABOARD! NEXT STOP, DISAPPOINTMENT

RAILROAD TYCOON 3

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
Gathering

DEVELOPER
PopTop

PRICE
£24.99

RELEASE
31 October

PLAYERS
1 (1-8 online)

MINIMUM SPEC
500MHz processor, 128MB RAM, 500MB HDD space, 16MB 3D graphics card

No, you haven't misread the title – this really is yet another addition to the train empire building series. Should you take up the challenge, it's up to you to lay all the right tracks, build stations and get the trains running on time without them breaking down. (Please, try to contain yourselves.) Although this may sound like the sort of software prospective train companies should use before being given a licence, it can be enjoyable – if you like trains, that is. Of course, plenty of people must do because, as the game's name suggests, this is *Railroad*'s third outing and Gathering has high hopes that it will match its predecessors' success.

Within the game, there are a number of scenarios that put you in different geographical locations, such as the American mid-west or continental Europe. Each one gives you objectives – from getting your company up and running to specific goals, where on completion you'll be graded bronze, silver or gold. As well as the different goals and locations, the scenarios also have themes. There's the World War II effort, another based on the Orient Express, and many others. However, they all have the same premise – you start your company in 1850 and have to decide where to set up your first station and tracks. As your company grows, you get better trains and various other improvements that we've come to expect from games of this ilk. Unfortunately, none of this is particularly revolutionary – in fact, the only things that do change are the trains themselves, the different industries that evolve and the growing cities.

games™ ENHANCED
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL
VIEW FROM...: In *Railroad Tycoon*'s previous incarnations the action was pretty flat. But now PopTop has developed its own 3D engine, giving the trains and scenery a great deal more life.



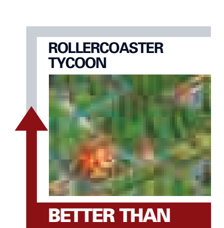
As your company grows you get updates on your progress as well as the economy.

The big sticking point, though, is that there really isn't that much new about *Railroad Tycoon 3*, apart from the way it looks (which, admittedly, could be enough for some people). PopTop has spent a significant amount of time creating its own 3D engine to show off the trains, which has been a success because there are some great-looking machines here. But once you've zoomed in on your new Norris locomotive a few times and watched it disappear into the tunnel you've just built, the novelty does wear thin.

Basically, if you liked the previous versions but had a hankering to watch your trains in 3D glory, then this is the game for you. But if you're looking for an innovative bit of sim gaming then there are far better examples out there for you to try.

VERDICT 4/10
SAME GAME, NEW 3D ENGINE AND, ER, THAT'S IT

ROLLERCOASTER TYCOON



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



THE SIMS



With the new 3D engine you can zoom in on your trains for in-your-face shunting action.



It's not only train tracks that you get to set down – you can build bridges and tunnels too.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Game Boy Advance

ORIGIN
Japan

PUBLISHER
Nintendo

DEVELOPER
In-House

PRICE
£29.99

RELEASE
14 November
(Japan/US: Out Now)

PLAYERS
1

NINTENDO HAS THE BALLS (LITERALLY) TO RELEASE ANOTHER POKÉMON GAME

POKÉMON PINBALL: RUBY AND SAPPHIRE

Much as we baulk at how the Pokémon franchise has been milked, it's fair to say that each game has managed to improve on the previous versions. Take the original *Pokémon Pinball*, for example – while it managed to combine aspects of the Pokémon world with the game of pinball pretty comprehensively, there was certainly room for improvement, not least because of the limitations of the Game Boy Color. So it was only a matter of time before Nintendo created a GBA sequel – and wouldn't you know it, it's even better than the last one.

Of course, if you're the kind of person who doesn't take too kindly to Pokémon, there's a good chance that this game won't interest you in the slightest. That's a shame though, simply because it means you'll miss out on a game that combines the best of both worlds – Pokémon and pinball – while putting aside a lot of the elements that usually put people off. The pinball aspects win out over the extensive wandering, random battling and other RPG bits of the Pokémon series which, if you're not a fan, can only be a good thing.

If you had the chance to play the first *Pokémon Pinball* on the GBC, though, you'll probably notice that very little has changed in the *Ruby And Sapphire* update. This is hardly surprising, seeing as that's pretty much how the franchise has evolved over the years. But while the basic premise remains the same – catching and evolving Pokémon as before, using the Pokéball provided to hit the relevant targets and drop holes as they become available – it's the delicate enhancements that make the game so much more enjoyable than before, including a new scrolling table over the original's flip-screen version, a wider playing field and plenty more unique features on each table.

The only complaints would have to focus on the fact that there are only two tables to choose from (Ruby or Sapphire) and as far as pinball games go, it's been made quite easy – probably for the benefit of younger fans. However, that doesn't stop the game being frustratingly addictive and one that's hard to put down, particularly if, like us, you have to catch 'em all before you can move on.

games™ ENHANCED

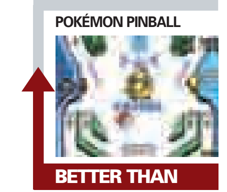
IMPROVING ON THE ORIGINAL

CATCH 'EM ALL: This has 50 more Pokémon than the last *Pinball*, most of them from the new games.

SCROLL LOCK: Rather than flicking between screens, the camera scrolls around to follow the ball.

VERDICT 8/10
A GREAT GAME THAT'LL CAPTIVATE FOR HOURS

POKÉMON PINBALL

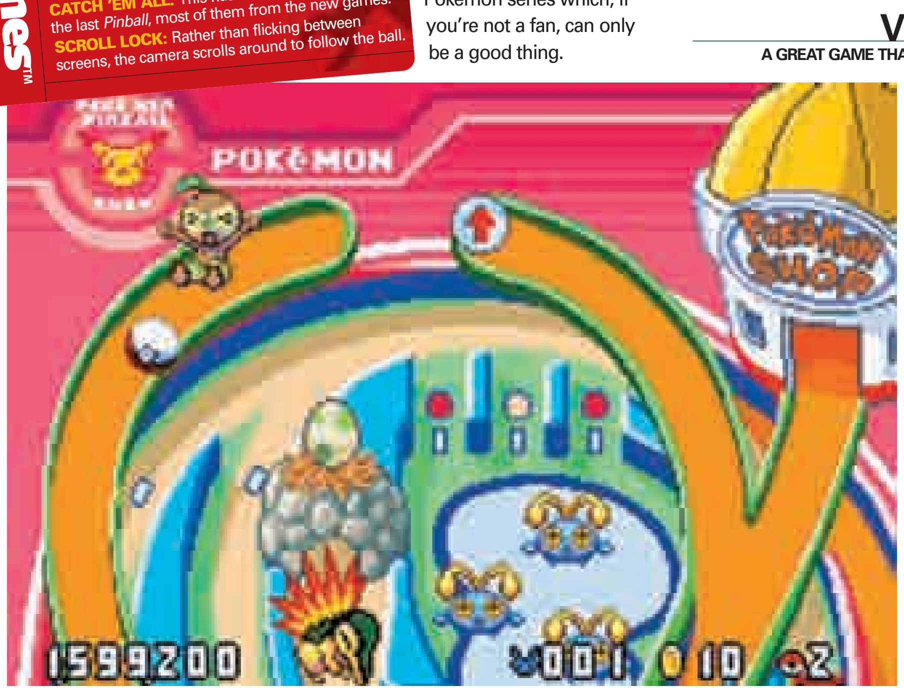


BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



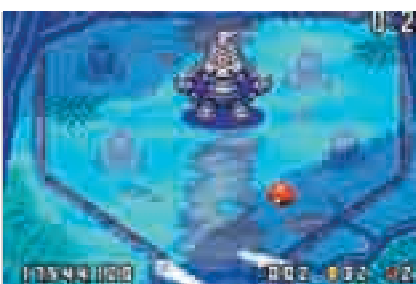
PINBALL CHALLENGE DELUXE



Each of the two tables has its own unique elements to play with – *Ruby*, for instance, has this side-tunnel that has to be cleared before power-ups can be collected. However, while each table is packed with hidden extras, it would have been nice to see a few more playfields.



If you want to complete your Pokédex then you'll have to evolve all the Pokémon you catch. Thankfully, it's not as hard as it sounds.



Special bonus stages pop up each time you capture three Pokémon, allowing you to really rack up some serious scores.



Between victory celebrations and colour commentary, it's plain to see why this doesn't have 3+ on the box…



The powered-up spikes and serves are complemented by some rather pretty effects.



Lizzie is the token Brit, complete with dodgy accent, punk stylings and, by the looks of it, a large tub of Immac. Good for her.

games™ GLOBAL
TAKING GAMING ONLINE
VERSUS: Those with an insatiable desire to play volleyball against complete strangers can find solace in *Outlaw Volleyball* as it's the first console spiking game to offer an online feature.

DETAILS

FORMAT REVIEWED
Xbox
ORIGIN
US
PUBLISHER
TDK
DEVELOPER
Hypnotix
PRICE
£39.99
RELEASE
Out Now
PLAYERS
1-4

OUTLAW VOLLEYBALL

FROM COURSES TO COURTS WITH AN IMPRESSIVE LACK OF STYLE

There's no doubt about it – 2003 is the year of beach volleyball. The last few years may have left volleyball fans wanting, but through the efforts of Acclaim, Tecmo and Namco, wannabe spikers have been offered varying amounts of fun and titillation, often in somewhat dubious ratios. Having simultaneously corrupted and livened up the sport of golf, Hypnotix has turned its attention to the year's hippest pastime in an attempt to lower yet more sporting standards.

Unfortunately, it doesn't take long for *Outlaw* humour to go from mildly amusing to downright annoying – with volleyball playing out much faster than golf, the quips and colour commentary soon repeat and grate in the space of minutes. This fleeting comedy appears in all elements of the game although, worryingly, it's the tutorial videos which prove funniest. The variety of modes doesn't disappoint though, allowing you to augment players through Drills, unlock characters and courts on the Tour or just kick back with some online play. And kick back you will – one of the most frustrating things about *OV* is the fact that there's very little feeling of control.

But what seems at first to be a truly pathetic attempt at a sports game does take shape (of sorts) once you put some time into learning exactly how it plays. The targeting system is a novel concept and, once you get used to it, works fairly well, but no matter how good you get, it won't be your own errors that annoy the most. *Outlaw Volleyball* is victim of some horrible AI flaws, from characters failing to notice or reach simple shots to some superhuman heroics that hamper your chances of ever scoring points.

Xbox Live support is obviously one of the major selling points for the game as the online service is noticeably lacking in the sports department. And while it may suffer from the same flaws as the regular multiplayer and, indeed, single-player modes (painfully extended rallies, poor partner AI and repetitive 'humour', among others) it remains a welcome inclusion for when Tour mode has you tearing your hair out. And believe us, it will…



VERDICT 4/10
A DISAPPOINTINGLY MEDIOCRE PACKAGE

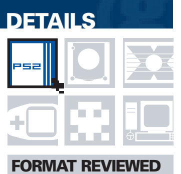






FINGERPRINT
WHAT MAKES THIS GAME UNIQUE
MULTIPLAYER: The first game didn't have this and having tried it , we wish this sequel had omitted it.
EXTRAS: Interviews, sketches, characters… the unlockables come thick and fast.

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2
OTHER FORMATS
Xbox, GameCube
ORIGIN
US
PUBLISHER
Vivendi Universal
DEVELOPER
Eurocom
PRICE
£39.99
RELEASE
24 October
PLAYERS
1-4

BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER: CHAOS BLEEDS

AND LO, THE SLAYER BECAME THE SLAIN…

When a high-profile sequel is not developed by the same firm as its successful predecessor, it's only natural to be a little wary. There's always the danger that the new team won't capture the magic of the original, will take the game in a direction that in no way benefits it, or could simply bang out a disappointing title and hope for the Robbie Williams effect – if you put a big enough name on the box, it'll sell regardless. Sometimes, though, we're treated to a multitude of these sins…

Frustrating to the point of quashing all enjoyment, it's clear even from an early stage how the 'intelligent' aspects of *Chaos Bleeds* are going to work. When you reach a dead end, it's usually just a case of retrieving a generic puzzle item (usually several of them) from a conveniently inconvenient hiding place before continuing. Cue several minutes of primitive platforming and beating up the undead with a functional combat system before the next 'mash the Triangle button until you find something interactive' session begins. To make matters worse, the six playable characters only serve to make the game even more cluttered. When so many different play styles share the same controls and interface, ease of use is sacrificed in favour of convenience.

For all its faults, *Chaos Bleeds* is not a terrible game. While never approaching the standard of the Xbox original, we have no doubt that at least some fans of the series will see through the stilted dialogue and repetitive one-liners and get a kick out of the excellent re-creations of familiar characters and locations. The trouble is that for every positive element, such as the impressive visuals (for the most part, at least), there's always something waiting to knock it down a peg or two, in this case the diabolical camera. Indeed, the main game is playable enough but between the inconsistencies of the adventuring sections and the needle-in-a-haystack puzzles, Buffy's latest outing manages to frustrate and disappoint more than it inspires or impresses. Not the greatest of claims for an adventure game that needs to hold the player's interest…

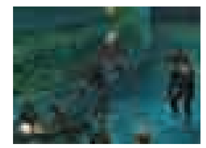


Burn, baby, burn. Vampires are susceptible to fire, much like people in general really.



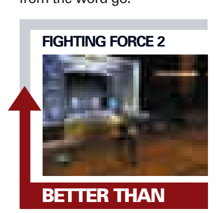
VERDICT 4/10
A DISAPPOINTING FOLLOW-UP TO A SOLID TITLE

XB/GC £39.99 Q3 '04



Owners of the Xbox or GameCube versions can expect little more than a slightly improved graphical showing and the ability to bore three of their friends with the awful multiplayer from the word go.

FIGHTING FORCE 2



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN



BUFFY THE VAMPIRE SLAYER

DETAILS



FORMAT REVIEWED
PlayStation2

OTHER FORMATS
PC

ORIGIN
US

PUBLISHER
THQ

DEVELOPER
Kuju

PRICE
£39.99

RELEASE
Out Now

PLAYERS
1-2 (2-8 online)

SORRY CHAPS, IT'S ALL BEEN DONE BEFORE

WARHAMMER 40,000: FIRE WARRIOR

The first-person shooter genre is getting increasingly tough to break into. With stand-out titles stealing the thunder of many a lesser game, it takes a pretty special product to make its mark on either the genre or the public. Similarly, new ideas are growing harder to come by as shelves fill with starry-eyed FPS titles, so what better way to make the ultimate shooter than by cobbling together ideas from across the genre?

Even within the first hour of the game, the level of digital plagiarism is nothing short of shocking – *Halo's* twin weapon and recharging shield systems, *Medal Of Honor's* beach landing and a worrying resemblance to *Mace Griffin* or *Red Faction II* are all evident from an early stage. It's not even this instance of grand theft data that concerns us, more the sloppy execution thereof. While the visuals are fairly impressive in places, some awful textures and frame-rate drops do nothing for the overall experience. The story is much the same as the game itself, and while there are moments when it seems it could be picking up, it shoots itself in the foot.

Normal enemies that take full clips to dispatch, 'puzzles' that make *Doom* look like a brainteaser… the potholes are all too common and apparent.

Levels are plentiful but generally very linear and corridor-based, leaving precious little room for tactical play. Thanks to the speedy shield regeneration, strategy is a forgotten art in *Fire Warrior* but, thankfully, the AI is in no position to take advantage of this due to its own flaws. When you've seen friend and foe alike run straight into your line of fire, or taken down a huge mechanical boss by standing underneath it and shooting ad infinitum, you really start to appreciate the structured and calculating AI of better titles.

The term '*Halo* beater' is being bandied around in an alarming number of circles (present company included), but this struggles to be a '*Red Faction II* beater'. This isn't an all-out disaster, more, disappointingly, a missed opportunity.



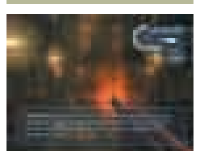
VERDICT 4/10
SHOWS PROMISE BUT FAILS TO DELIVER

MACE GRIFFIN



BETTER THAN

WORSE THAN

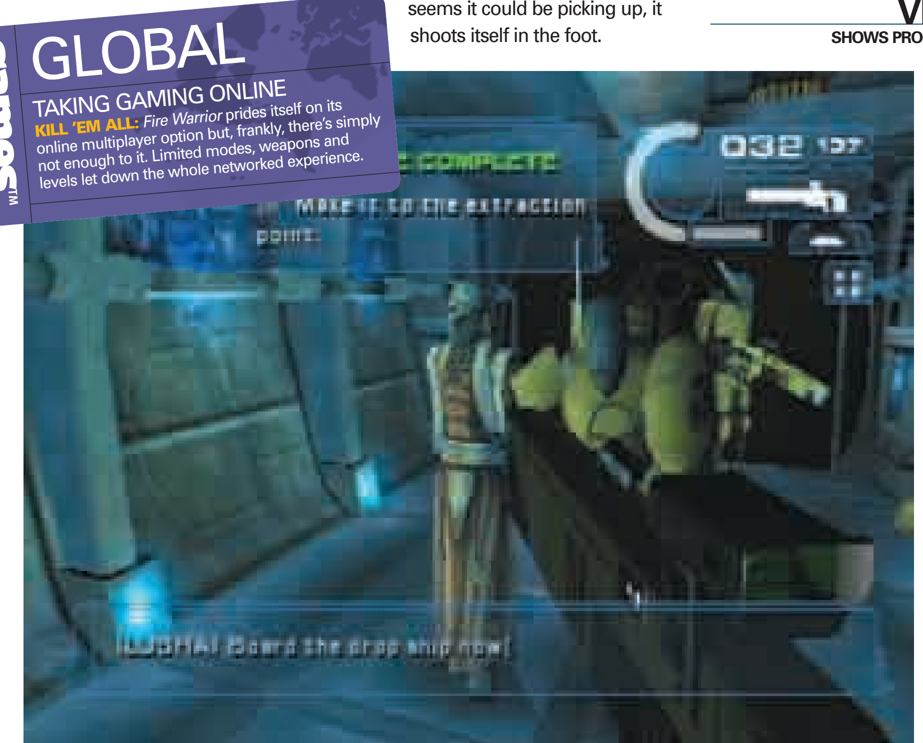


HALO

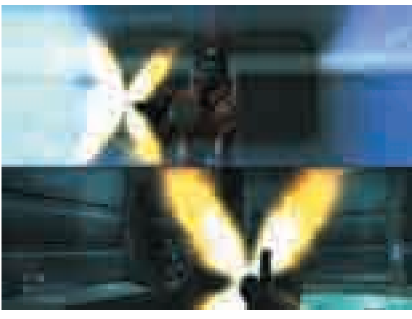
PC £29.99 26 SEPT

Next to the big guns, *Fire Warrior* doesn't stand a chance. The narrow, linear level design and uninspired gameplay is primitive.

games™ GLOBAL
TAKING GAMING ONLINE
KILL 'EM ALL: *Fire Warrior* prides itself on its online multiplayer option but, frankly, there's simply not enough to it. Limited modes, weapons and levels let down the whole networked experience.



In an unprecedented feat of poor casting, Burt 'Cato out of the *Pink Panther* films' Kwouk provides the voice of Lusha, one of your superiors. But don't go expecting the crazy vocal stylings of *Banzai* – *Fire Warrior* is based on a table-top game, after all.



Multiplayer is a curious affair – the unbalanced arsenal and labyrinth arenas kill all pick-up-and-play appeal.



The graphics are undeniably impressive in places but, more often than not, the textures are pretty shoddy.



“Let’s blow some shit up… it’s more fun!” **Super Bomberman SNES [Hudson] 1993**


37
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3


eMag



A PARAGON PUBLICATION
NO.11 OCTOBER 2003
00p
RETRO
MICRO GAMES A
STRIDER
A Step-By-Step Guide To Level Two
Of Capcom's Classic Ninja Adventure
THIS MONTH IN 1995
Find Out What Was Happening In October '95
Amuse Yourself
Discover How To Get Set
Up With Original Arcade
Games In Your Own Home
THE GREATEST
RETRO GAME
EVER MADE!
Are You Cut Out To
Be A Gunstar Hero?
AMIGA
CLASSIC 16-BIT COMMODORE GAMING!
THE MEGAMAN
FAMILY TREE
CLASSIC GAME SYSTEM
BUYERS' GUIDE



With the first footage of SEGA's upcoming *Out Run 2* now available on the Internet, it's clear that the game will use a similar control method to that of the original *SEGA Rally Championship* – extreme powersliding is an integral element. This will, of course, result in an exciting gaming experience, but one that may have limited appeal and which is likely to seem simplistic compared to other racing titles on offer today.

Understandably, then, we have to ask if games that feature 'retro' content can be as good as titles released today? The answer, clearly, depends on what you consider to be a 'good' game. If hundreds of cars, tracks and upgrades, combined with a lengthy list of objectives is what you define as good, then the answer is probably no. If, however, you fancy a quick burst of fun that doesn't require an instruction manual the size of the Yellow Pages to play, then some of the titles now referred to as 'retro', or featuring 'retro' content, could be just the thing you're looking for.



Keith Edwards, Retro Editor

THE DREAMCAST LIVES ON

SEGA makes new Dreamcast games

After the likes of *Border Down* and *King Of Fighters 2002*, it's great to see that Dreamcast titles are still receiving a healthy amount of interest in the Far East. Even better news is that SEGA itself is now going to release the latest instalment of its *Puyo Puyo* franchise on its classic machine. It may not be the best-known title in the world, but we're more than happy that *Puyo Puyo Fever* will be appearing on the under-appreciated console.

Of course, a new release on the Dreamcast by none other than SEGA delivers more questions than answers. Will SEGA be planning more titles? Recent games like *King Of Fighters 2002* have sold more units than most Xbox titles. And could this persuade other third parties to return to the Dreamcast fold? More than anything though, we'd love to see SEGA actually re-launch the Dreamcast. The machine itself seems more popular than ever and many titles can still give their 128-bit peers a run for their money. Time will tell, but in the meantime we'll be making some pre-orders…



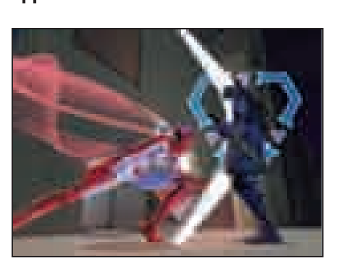
▲ Wait! Don't chuck it out yet – you can get new games for it, from SEGA no less…

SHINOBI TWO

After *Shinobi* received a favourable response on the PlayStation2 earlier this year, SEGA has decided that it's now time to unleash some screenshots of the swish-looking sequel. Whilst little is currently known about *Kunoichi* (which translates as 'female ninja' in Japanese), it's currently looking like it will be closely following in its predecessors' footsteps.

The Kunoichi herself is looking suitably athletic (although her suit makes her look like she's just appeared in an episode of *Battle Of The Planets*) and early screenshots suggest just as much action as the first game. Overworks is promising that *Kunoichi* will be easier to play than the original, but hasn't revealed if the original arcade game will appear as an extra.





▲ Liked *Shinobi*? Then you might want to start saving up for *Kunoichi*. It'll be like *Shinobi* but easier, and with a lady in it and everything. Want more reasons? Um, get back to us…

Where's the GP32?

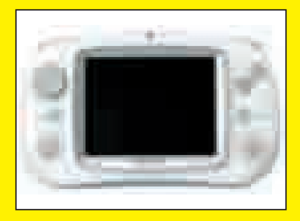
The retro handheld seems to have vanished

We're starting to get a little worried about the whereabouts of this fantastic little machine. After it appeared at last year's ECTS we were expecting to see Game Park's retro wonder to go on sale in the UK. Scouring the various stalls at this year's show, however, revealed that the GP32 was nowhere to be seen.

The GP32 is a powerful handheld that can run a selection of emulators, making it the perfect machine for the retro gamer on the move. Although there were some rumblings a few months back about a UK release, we've since heard nothing. This is a real shame as the machine is developing a pretty impressive underground following, something that Game Park would be wise to capitalise upon right now.



▲ We love this machine, but where's it gone?



▲ For retro gamers on the move, this is ideal.



Think it's been quiet since 1995? How wrong you are. Since the American launch of Sony's PlayStation in September '95, no fewer than ten new gaming formats have appeared. Though most of them have struggled to keep up with Sony's machine…

GREAT MOVIES IN 1995 (AMERICA)

1. Toy Story
Grossed $191,796,233

2. Apollo 13
Grossed $172,070,496

3. GoldenEye
Grossed $106,429,941

4. Se7en
Grossed $100,125,643

5. Die Hard: With A Vengeance
Grossed $100,012,499

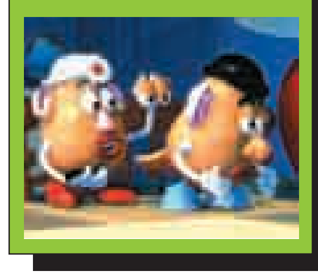
6. Braveheart
Grossed $75,545,647

7. Bad Boys
Grossed $65,647,413

8. Twelve Monkeys
Grossed $57,141,459

9. The Usual Suspects
Grossed $23,272,306

10. The Quick & The Dead
Grossed $18,552,460



UK CHARTS FOR OCT 1995

1. Fairground
Simply Red

2. Mr Boombastic
Shaggy

3. Who The Fk Is Alice?**
Smokie/Roy Chubby Brown

4. Mis-Shapes/Sorted For Es & Wizz
Pulp

5. You Are Not Alone
Michael Jackson

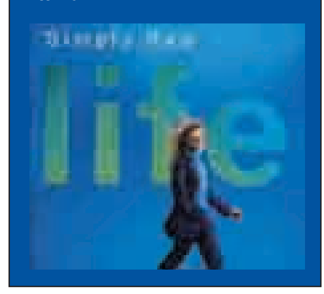
6. When Love And Hate Collide
Def Leppard

7. Fantasy
Mariah Carey

8. Gangsta's Paradise
Coolio

9. I'd Lie For You (And That's The Truth)
Meatloaf

10. Power Of A Woman
Eternal



GAMING NEWS OCT '95

Nintendo's pride can't stop Sony

While many gamers had been awaiting the arrival of Nintendo's much-hyped Ultra 64, by October 1995 it was becoming increasingly obvious that Sony's PlayStation was going to be a far stronger competitor than anyone had predicted. The system had been released in Japan at the end of 1994, and while neither that nor the American launch in September 1995 had been record-breaking, the level of support and excitement in the development community was already obvious.

Of course, while Nintendo's in-house creations had always been of a certain quality, the company would need support from other developers if it was ever going to compete with the number of titles in production for Sony's CD-based format. By this time a handful of the company's closest allies, including Squaresoft and Capcom, had already defected, but, as usual, Nintendo made the best of a bad situation by continuing to add supposedly sought-after developers to its so-called 'Dream Team'.

This list of Ultra 64 supporters was reputedly hand-picked by Nintendo itself, and had begun a year earlier with Rare and Williams. October 1995 would see LucasArts confirmed as a Dream Team developer, along with the announcement of its first Ultra 64 game, *Shadows Of The Empire*. Unfortunately, the game turned out to be average at best, though that didn't stop hard-core European gamers from buying American import copies for as much as £150.


▶ The Ultra 64 with, erm, wings and stuff.

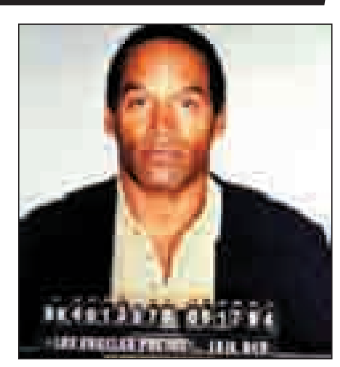
LucasArts' work with the Ultra 64 wasn't the only Nintendo-related news to break during this month in 1995. Aside from Nintendo of Japan changing the name of its upcoming console from Ultra Famicom to Nintendo 64, the company also slightly reduced the price of the Virtual Boy in America from $179.95 (£114) to $159.99 (£101). Unlike the Game Boy, this innovative piece of hardware (which was developed by Game Boy creator, Gunpei Yokoi) had failed to capture the imagination of the gaming public, mainly due to its cumbersome nature and limited technical abilities. Funnily enough, the new price failed to jump-start sales.

WORLD NEWS

OJ OFF THE HOOK

On 3 October 1995, actor and former American football player Orenthal James Simpson was found not guilty of murdering his ex-wife Nicole and her friend Ronald Goldman. The jury took a mere four hours to reach the verdict, which was remarkable considering that the trial had been one of the lengthiest ever in US legal history at an astonishing 473 days long.

Despite the outcome, the case for murder had been backed up by numerous pieces of physical evidence, including a pair of gloves – one found at the murder scene and the other at Simpson's home. Even so, many felt that the Los Angeles Police Department's integrity was questionable, and that the enquiry was driven by racism.


▶ Frank Drebin, alas, didn't lead the investigation…



Why Don't They Remake...

AXELAY

WE WANT TO SHOOT 'EM UP ALL OVER AGAIN

Released: **1992**
Publisher: **Konami**
Developer: **Konami**
Format: **SNES**

If there's one game that's screaming out for a remake, it's Konami's superb SNES shooter *Axelay*. Back in the golden days of the the Super Nintendo, it seemed the developer could do no wrong. *Super Contra III, Super Castlevania IV* and *Cybernator* were just a few of the titles that proved that it was a force to be reckoned with. It was perhaps *Axelay*, however, that will probably be remembered as one of Konami's finest hours on Nintendo's 16-bit console.

The Japanese developer had consistently proven that it knew the SNES's hardware inside out and *Axelay* was the perfect chance to show off just how far the firm's technical skills had progressed. *Axelay*'s first level was like nothing ever seen on a 16-bit console. After powering up your ship you found yourself flying through an amazing 3D stage. Okay, so strictly speaking it was really just some fancy Mode 7, but nevertheless it was simply gob-smacking to look at and created an astounding sense of depth. Enemy fighters, massive boulders and numerous gun emplacements were just a few of the hazards you had to negotiate, and all scaled perfectly as they came into view.

À LA MODE 7

The second level may have been initially disappointing as Konami used a more traditional 2D approach, but within moments it was obvious that it was every bit as good as the first. Levels alternated throughout the rest of the game and all achieved high levels of excellence, with special mention going to level five's incredible lava stage (complete with huge *Dune*-style lava worms). Exquisite level design and stunning visuals were only the half of it, though. Konami had created a host of fantastic soundtracks on previous titles, but the score in *Axelay* was even better. From the eerie second stage opening, to the awesome boss encounters, the game's soundtrack was amazing from start to finish and perfectly complemented the on-screen action.

It was the aforementioned boss encounters that most gamers will fondly remember. A giant robotic ED 209 rip-off (complete with a devastating laser) and a huge fiery Elemental were just a few of the delights to encounter. Most used Mode 7 to stunning effect and all were bloody hard to defeat. *Axelay* was one tough cookie, with even Easy mode offering little respite from the hordes of enemies that would swarm towards you. Fortunately, *Axelay*'s ship came complete with a choice of three interchangeable weapons, although getting hit would render the weapon useless.

Whilst many gamers bemoan the vast amount of SNES ports that turn up on the GBA, this is one title that would be perfect, how about it Konami? We're waiting…









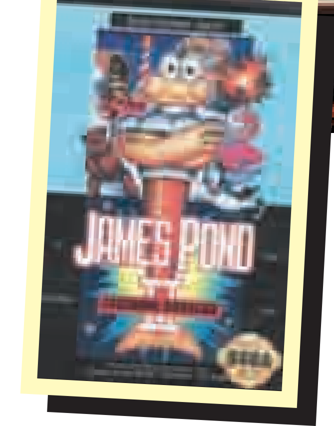
LOOK BACK IN ANGER

If you thought that Electronic Arts' only wrongdoing was selling us yearly updates of its latest sports franchise, you've obviously never played Robocod…

Developed by Millennium, *James Pond II: Codename Robocod* (to give its full title) was another sub-standard platformer in the style of *Rolo To The Rescue*. And, like poor Rolo, Robocod couldn't hold a candle to the moustachioed king of platformers. While the title sequence was fairly amusing – Robocod appears to the strains of some jazzed up *Robocop* music – the game was anything but.

For starters, the James Pond sprite was one of the most charisma-free characters ever created. The idea of seeing a fish dressed as Robocop is funny for about, oh, five seconds. *Robocod*'s plot was similarly inane, seeing you trying to liberate Toyland Castle and rescue Father Christmas, a premise that gave rise to some of the worst elements ever found in a platform title. Toyland Castle consisted of doors that had to be unlocked before you could enter them, but every one concealed a generically bland level. Each was a nightmare to negotiate due to the ridiculously twitchy controls, and it seemed no thought was given to the location of the exits.

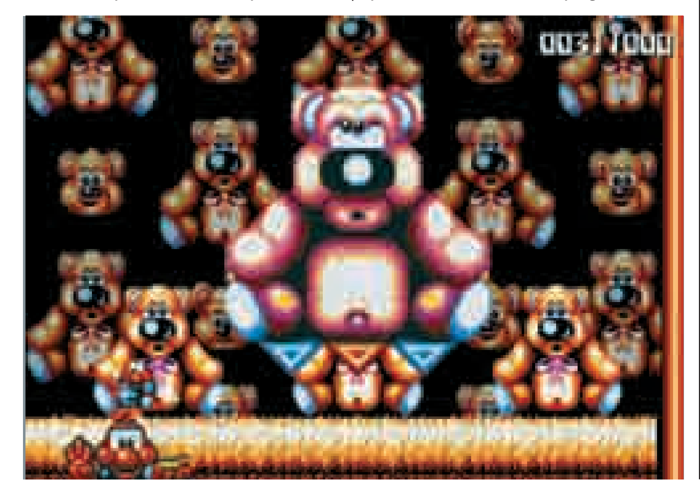
Robocod's abilities were poorly implemented and limited to jumping on enemies to kill them, or using his stretchy torso to reach out-of-the-way platforms. While destroying enemies with your bum is hardly a new idea, at least other games featured decent collision detection so that landing slightly to the side of an enemy wouldn't result in the loss of energy.




▲ Look at him go, jumping around in his by-the-numbers themed level. Again.

And did we mention the blatant advertising that saw Penguin bars scattered through most levels?

Robocod's biggest crime, however, was the god-awful music. Millennium had managed to create some of the most nauseatingly annoying tunes ever featured in a videogame. All of this would have been fine if this game stayed dead and buried, but, unfortunately, reports suggest that the metallic one will be appearing on the Game Boy Advance. Save us…





LAST MONTH'S 3DO SCREENSHOTS

Didn't recognise all those 3DO screenshots? It's okay, we didn't think you would…

FIRST ROW
- Casper
- Way Of The Warrior
- Mega Race
- Space Ace
- Samurai Shodown
- Club 3DO Station Invasion
- Alone in the Dark 2
- Captain Quazar
- Ballz
- Killing Time

SECOND ROW
- Shock Wave 2
- Syndicate
- Sewer Shark
- Star Fighter
- Gex
- 11th Guest
- Battle Pinball
- Flying Nightmares
- Dragon Lore
- The Horde

THIRD ROW
- Microcosm
- Primal Rage
- Mad Dog II
- Stellar 7 – Draxon's Revenge
- Phoenix
- Crash N Burn
- FIFA International Soccer
- Hell: A Cyberpunk Thriller
- Super Street Fighter II Turbo
- Theme Park

FOURTH ROW
- Night Trap
- Slopestyle
- Creature Shock
- Crime Patrol
- Space Hulk
- Who Shot Johnny Rock?
- Balzerion
- D
- Wing Commander III HOTT
- Return Fire

FIFTH ROW
- Out Of This World
- Off-World Interceptor
- Shadow War Of Succession
- Ice Breaker
- Foes Of Ali
- Gridders
- Doom
- Need For Speed
- POed
- Who Shot Johnny Rock?

SIXTH ROW
- Defcon 5
- Waialae County Club
- Slam N Jam 95
- Demolition Man
- Star Wars Rebel Assault
- Bust-A-Move
- Battle Sport
- Myst
- Road Rash
- The Need For Speed

SEVENTH ROW
- Shanghai Triple Threat
- Cannon Fodder
- The Incredible Machine
- StarBlade
- Corpse Killer
- Brain Dead
- Dragon's Lair
- Drug Wars
- Flashback
- Guardian War

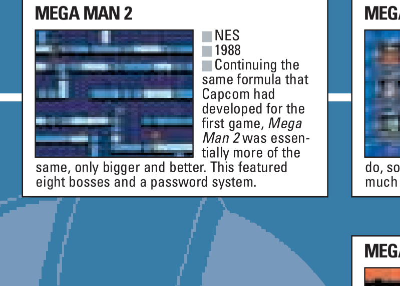
EIGHTH ROW
- PaTaank
- Alone In The Dark
- Immercenary
- Total Eclipse
- Bladeforce
- Novastorm
- 3D Atlas
- Battle Chess
- Escape From Monster Manor
- Family Feud

MEGA MAN



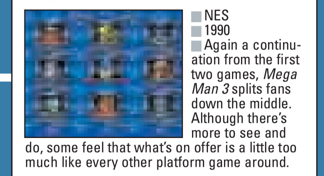
- NES
- 1987
- There had already been Super Man and Batman, so how about a hero called Mega Man? Well, that would be fine, except for the fact the Capcom's hero was actually called Rock Man in Japan…

MEGA MAN 2



- NES
- 1988
- Continuing the same formula that Capcom had developed for the first game, *Mega Man 2* was essentially more of the same, only bigger and better. This featured eight bosses and a password system.

MEGA MAN 3



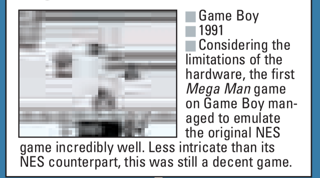
- NES
- 1990
- Again a continuation from the first two games, *Mega Man 3* splits fans down the middle. Although there's more to see and do, some feel that what's on offer is a little too much like every other platform game around.

HANDHELDS

MEGA MAN 4

- NES
- 1991
- Although *Mega Man 4* is as popular as its predecessors, it's often seen as a weak link in the series. Offering little in terms of innovation, this looked dated compared to what the SNES was offering.

MEGA MAN I



- Game Boy
- 1991
- Considering the limitations of the hardware, the first *Mega Man* game on Game Boy managed to emulate the original NES game incredibly well. Less intricate than its NES counterpart, this was still a decent game.

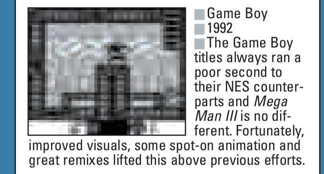
MEGA MAN II

- Game Boy
- 1992
- Despite offering a few extra items that went missing from the original Game Boy *Mega Man*, its sequel offered nothing new. Whilst enjoyable to play, it was still a poor second to the original NES games.

MEGA MAN 5

- NES
- 1992
- Mega Man's fifth outing contained some rather groovy visuals (check out the parallax on display), an interesting plot involving a clone of Proto Man and was a great continuation of the series.

MEGA MAN III



- Game Boy
- 1992
- The Game Boy titles always ran a poor second to their NES counterparts and *Mega Man III* is no different. Fortunately, improved visuals, some spot-on animation and great remixes lifted this above previous efforts.

THE X FACTOR

PARTY

MEGA MAN X

- SNES
- 1993
- *Mega Man X* was a complete standalone series from the original NES titles. Dr Light was dead and Dr Wily and his cronies were gone. This was a great debut on the SNES and made full use of the new format.

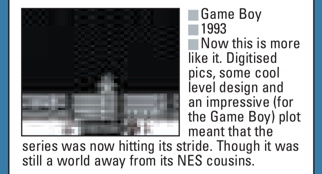
MEGA MAN 6

- NES
- 1993
- With the NES rapidly approaching the end of its shelf life, Nintendo decided to have the sixth *Mega Man* title licensed exclusively to itself. But it never managed to achieve the same status as the rest of them.

ROCK BOARD

- NES
- 1993
- When *Rock Board* arrived on the NES, it was clear that Mega Man's name was being applied to any old tat. You rolled dice and either built structures or faced the consequences depending on the result.

MEGA MAN IV



- Game Boy
- 1993
- Now this is more like it. Digitised pics, some cool level design and an impressive (for the Game Boy) plot meant that the series was now hitting its stride. Though it was still a world away from its NES cousins.

SPORTS

MEGA MAN'S SOCCER

- SNES
- 1994
- Unsurprisingly, *Mega Man's Soccer* is as good as it sounds (i.e. not very). Poor controls were one of the many problems in this spin-off. Fortunately, Mega Man stuck to blowing things up in the future.

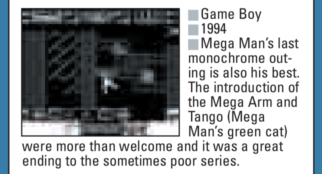
MEGA MAN X2

- SNES
- 1993
- The *X* franchise continued with a title that didn't feel quite so good as its predecessor. The Air Dash seemed to be more trouble than it was worth and the difficulty started leaning towards the frustrating.

MEGA MAN: THE WILY WARS

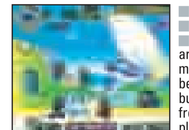
- Mega Drive
- 1993
- Mega Man's only Mega Drive outing was technically impressive, had some great gameplay and is now incredibly tough to track down. Don't be surprised if you're asked a high price if you do find one.

MEGA MAN V



- Game Boy
- 1994
- Mega Man's last monochrome outing is also his best. The introduction of the Mega Arm and Tango (Mega Man's green cat) were more than welcome and it was a great ending to the sometimes poor series.

MEGA MAN: THE POWER BATTLE



- Arcade
- 1995
- Mega Man's arcade outings may have been beautiful to look at, but a step away from the traditional platforming of old in favour of boss battles meant that this was for the fans only.

MEGA MAN X3

- Multi
- 1995
- The third *X* title delivered several enhancements over its peers. Zero was now playable (though he seemed to have been added as an afterthought) and the bosses now changed their attack patterns mid battle.

MEGA MAN 7

- SNES
- 1995
- Mega Man's overdue sequel offered plenty of fond memories for fans of the NES games and was seen as a return to form. It's also noteworthy that this marked the first appearance of Bass and his robotic dog.

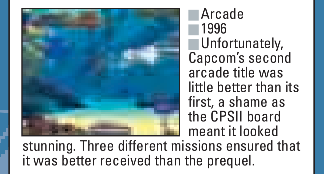
MEGA MAN GG

- Game Gear
- 1995
- Programmed by US Gold, *Mega Man GG* was a fun title but was ultimately marred by poor controls and the fact that it never felt like part of the franchise. Check it out, but prepare to be disappointed.

MEGA MAN FAMILY TREE

Every company needs a mascot and Capcom is no different. Mega Man is easily one of the developer's most recognisable characters, from platformers to cameos in *Marvel Vs Capcom 2* and *Cannon Spike* he's certainly seen a lot of action. Join **games™** as we discover what he's been up to over the last 16 years.

MEGA MAN 2: THE POWER FIGHTERS



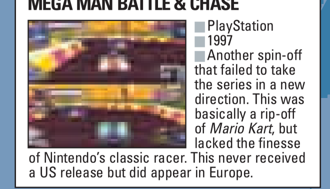
- Arcade
- 1996
- Unfortunately, Capcom's second arcade title was little better than its first, a shame as the CPSII board meant it looked stunning. Three different missions ensured that it was better received than the prequel.

MEGA MAN 8

- PlayStation/Saturn
- 1996
- By now, the mighty Mega Man was beginning to look a little tired. Both versions looked nice enough, but something didn't quite gel. *Mega Man 8* added too much and suffered for it.

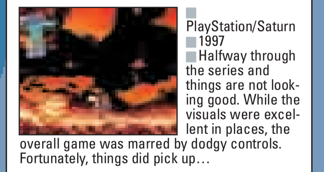
RACING

MEGA MAN BATTLE & CHASE



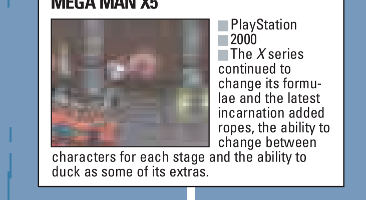
- PlayStation
- 1997
- Another spin-off that failed to take the series in a new direction. This was basically a rip-off of *Mario Kart*, but lacked the finesse of Nintendo's classic racer. This never received a US release but did appear in Europe.

MEGA MAN X4



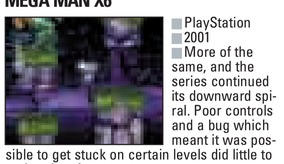
- PlayStation/Saturn
- 1997
- Halfway through the series and things are not looking good. While the visuals were excellent in places, the overall game was marred by dodgy controls. Fortunately, things did pick up…

MEGA MAN X5



- PlayStation
- 2000
- The *X* series continued to change its formulae and the latest incarnation added ropes, the ability to change between characters for each stage and the ability to duck as some of its extras.

MEGA MAN X6



- PlayStation
- 2001
- More of the same, and the series continued its downward spiral. Poor controls and a bug which meant it was possible to get stuck on certain levels did little to endear it to fans.

MEGA MAN X7

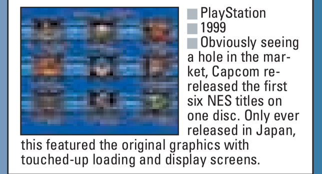
- PlayStation2
- 2003
- Containing a mixture of both 2D and 3D levels, and with the handy ability to switch between two different characters at will, this looks like it may well turn the *X* series around once it's released.

MEGA MAN NETWORK TRANSMISSION

- GameCube
- 2003
- The first GameCube title is a cel-shaded extravaganza that combines both *Battle network* and traditional *Mega Man* to great effect. It isn't going to appeal to everyone, but it's worth picking up.

3D

MEGA MAN COMPLETE WORKS



- PlayStation
- 1999
- Obviously seeing a hole in the market, Capcom re-released the first six NES titles on one disc. Only ever released in Japan, this featured the original graphics with touched-up loading and display screens.

MEGA MAN LEGENDS

- PlayStation/N64
- 1998
- *Legends* was an arcade adventure and a huge departure for the series, it later appeared on the N64 and apart from slight technical alterations, was exactly the same game. With many of the original characters missing, this is a real oddity.

MEGA MAN LEGENDS 2

- PlayStation
- 2000
- *Legends 2* offered a few enhancements over *MML*, but was essentially another arcade adventure which offered little to make it stand out from a slew of identical games. Let's hope Capcom doesn't revive the series.

MEGA MAN & BASS

- SNES
- 1998
- Recently available as a port on the Game Boy Advance, *Mega Man & Bass* plays very similarly to *Mega Man X4*. It suffers from the same problems and is another weak link in the *Mega Man* chain.

MEGA MAN XTREME

- Game Boy Color
- 2000
- *Mega Man Xtreme* was basically a Game Boy reworking of the *X* series. As a result it shares all the same strengths and weaknesses, but ultimately suffers due to the small screen.

MEGA MAN XTREME 2

- Game Boy Color
- 2001
- Spanning the first three SNES titles, *Xtreme 2* was a marked improvement over *Xtreme* but was still hampered by the games it had been based upon. And, as is to be expected, the small screen didn't help.

RPG

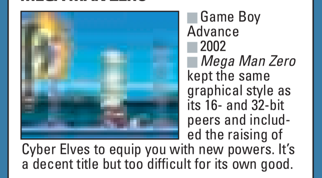
MEGA MAN BATTLE NETWORK

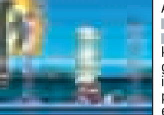
- Game Boy Advance
- 2001
- *Network* was an isometric title that fused RPG elements with card collecting to create a unique little game. Once you've got your head around it, it's a pleasant change to the rest of the series.

MEGA MAN BATTLE NETWORK 2

- Game Boy Advance
- 2002
- *BN2* improved on the original and, despite its quirkiness, is a welcome break from the *Mega Man* series. There's plenty to collect, some interesting bosses and some slick isometric visuals.

MEGA MAN ZERO



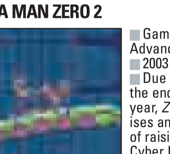


- Game Boy Advance
- 2002
- *Mega Man Zero* kept the same graphical style as its 16- and 32-bit peers and included the raising of Cyber Elves to equip you with new powers. It's a decent title but too difficult for its own good.

MEGA MAN BATTLE NETWORK 3

- Game Boy Advance
- 2003
- *Battle Network 3* was more of the same, although you now needed to buy two versions (*Blue* & *White*) à *la Pokémon* if you wanted to collect everything available in the game.

MEGA MAN ZERO 2



- Game Boy Advance
- 2003
- Due out towards the end of the year, *Zero 2* promises an easier way of raising your Cyber Elves, a co-operative two-player game via system link and improved visuals.

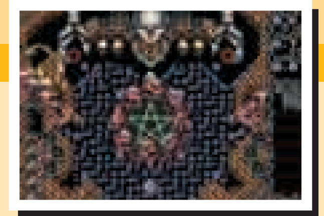


DON'T GO CHANGING

DEVIL CRASH

Western gamers always seem to get a bad deal, with 'the man' always trying to spoil Japanese games. Like Devil Crash…

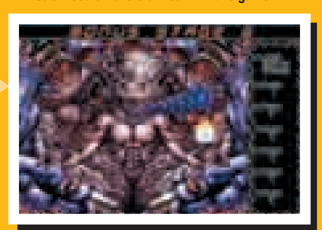
It's not just violent beat-'em-ups that can undergo cosmetic changes to make them more suitable for our sanitised Western market – just take a look at our latest victim. After wowing gamers on the PC Engine, *Devil Crash* (the sequel to Naxat Soft's *Alien Crush*) arrived on the Mega Drive and was a firm favourite with Japanese and import gamers alike. But once this gothic-heavy pinball title was ready for its Western release, worried publishers demanded a few changes to the game's content, just in case parents became outraged by the 'shocking' tables.



For a game that contained as much of a mystical theme as this one did, you would have thought that it would have received a complete overhaul in the visual department. Funnily enough, all it received was a name change and the removal of a few symbols. The Satanic-sounding *Devil Crash* was replaced by the bland *Dragon's Fury*, while the pentagrams from the original were turned into consumer-friendly stars.

While it's perhaps understandable why these changes were made, we still can't understand why so much of the game's original content remained intact. Here was a game that contained grinning skulls (that would raucously mock you whenever a ball was lost), chanting monks and beautiful maidens who transformed into hideous reptiles. And if the name got changed from *Devil Crash*, why did the game still contain plenty of pictures of things that looked like, er, devils?

▲ Sometimes you have to be thankful for Western sensibilities. Who knows how many young souls Satan could have claimed with this game…





In our continuing effort to bring you the cinematic performances of various videogames, we now turn our attention to the brief appearance of Nintendo's Wild Gunman in Back To The Future Part II

It couldn't have been easy to recreate the magic of the Eighties in a futuristic retro café, but somehow *Wild Gunman* delivered in spades. After meeting up with an old Biff and his grandson, Marty McFly (Michael J Fox) discovers Nintendo's *Wild Gunman* arcade game.

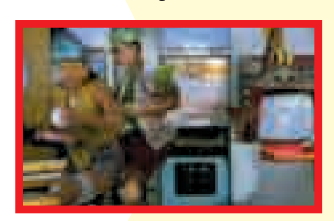
Eagerly making his way over to the ancient machine, Marty tries to impress two young kids who have managed to get the machine working by showing off his crackshot skills. Needless to say, the two youngsters are far from impressed with his efforts…

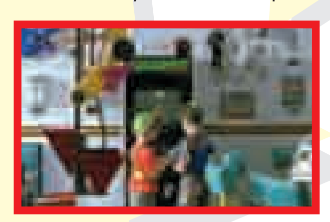
"That's baby stuff" mocks a pre-Hobbit Elijah Wood, who then shuffles off in his ridiculous hi-tech clothing to no doubt buy some of the merchandise that's blatantly plugged throughout the film.

Despite only having the most minimal of screen time, our hero gives a stoic performance that saw it get soundly thrashed by a diminutive Michael J Fox (although it was later revealed that Fox offered a bribe of a hundred credits and a ride in the DeLorean). Even a boarded-up *Pac-Man* machine could do little to draw eager eyes away from *Gunman*'s impressive acting abilities.

Unfortunately, however, the film work quickly dried up and the cabinet dropped off the radar for some time. The washed-up machine was last seen hounding Elijah Wood for a walk-on part in *Return Of The King*…







▲ "Hello? McFly? Ever seen a *Wild Gunman* cabinet before?" Well, yes, he has actually.



Advanced Dungeons & Dragons (Intellivision) Mattel, 1982 – American advertisement


Classic Machine
SPECIFICATIONS
PROCESSOR: Motorola MC68000
SPEED: 7.16 MHz
RAM: 512 Chip RAM or 1MB Chip RAM on motherboard
ROM: 256K or 512K on motherboard
SOUND: Two stereo audio output ports
Commodore
AMIGA
5



IT MIGHT HAVE LOOKED LIKE A PROPER COMPUTER – YOU KNOW, FOR GROWN UPS – BUT THE AMIGA 500 PROVED TO BE A TREAT FOR GAMERS EVERYWHERE (ADULT OR OTHERWISE)

With the Commodore 64 such a firm favourite with gamers, expectations were high when Commodore announced an (unofficial) follow up. Released in 1987, the Amiga 500 instantly became a classic thanks to some savvy marketing by Commodore and it easily set itself apart from Atari's slightly inferior ST.

When the Amiga 1000 had been released in 1985 it was seen more as a business machine and its high price put off many potential buyers. Fortunately, Commodore released a lower spec machine at an affordable price and the Amiga 500 that we all know and love was delivered into the hands of gamers.

Pre-loaded with Commodore's popular (though often bugged) Workbench application, the 500 quickly proved itself to be an extremely versatile machine that was just at home calculating spreadsheets as it was playing the likes of *Populous* or *Shadow Of The Beast*. Gamers were in awe of the fantastic visuals and superior sound that the Amiga offered and it was arguably a key suspect in the death of the 8-bit market.

Unfortunately, Commodore's insistence on bringing out new machines at an alarming rate meant that the company eventually found itself in financial difficulties. Commodore's dream is now long dead but at least we still have fond memories.

You've got to be kidding

ANYTHING WITH '32' IN ITS NAME IS GOING TO BE BAD

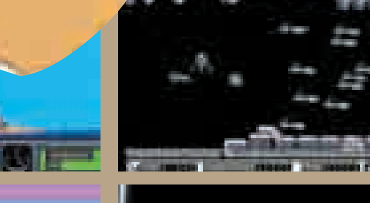
We'll admit to being among the many suckers who were tricked into buying Commodore's ill-fated CD32 that was released in the company's final days. Though technically impressive, the games failed to deliver, with many titles just straight ports of their Amiga 500 or 1200 counterparts. Sure, you may have been able to play the likes of *Worms* and *Pinball Fantasies* with a joypad, but this did little to stop you from feeling pretty ripped off at having paid £329 for the privilege.

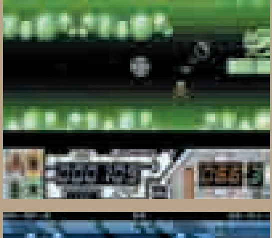
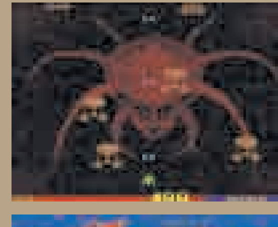
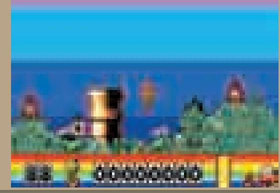
"Why I love my Amiga"

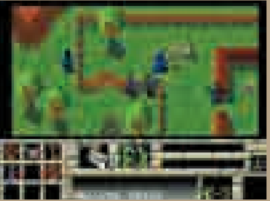
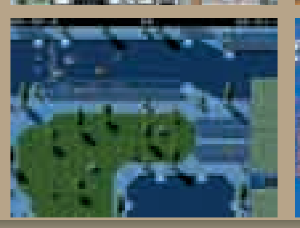
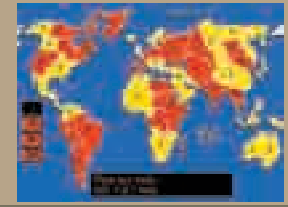
I still have vivid memories of walking into my local Adam's World shop and using every penny of my savings to buy my Amiga all those years ago, complete with a copy of *Speedball II*, which the shop assistant assured me was brilliant. It was a real step forward from everything else at the time and can still hold its own as a 'proper' computer as well as a games machine today. Plus it helped keep me off the streets for many of my adolescent years…

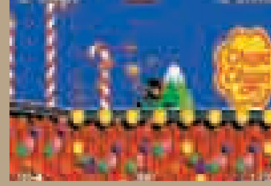
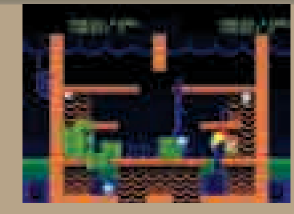
Martin Mathers

Classic Machine

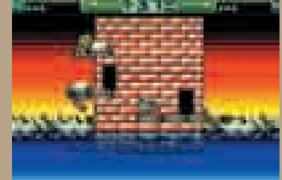
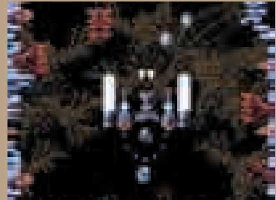
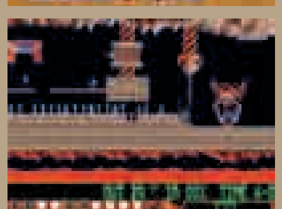
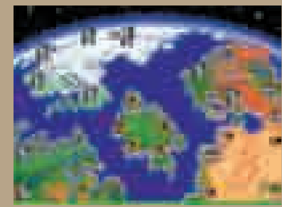
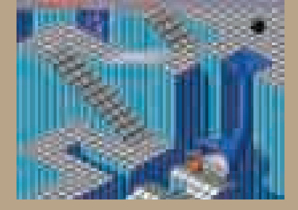



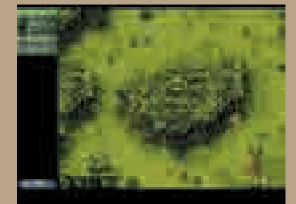




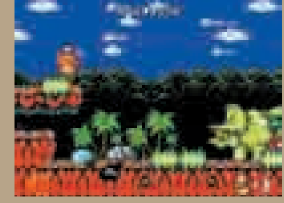




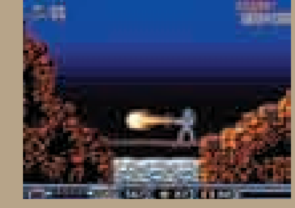
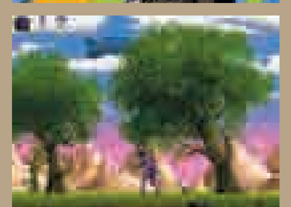



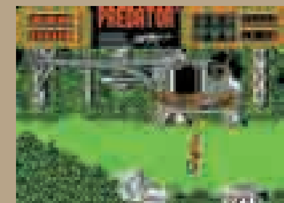
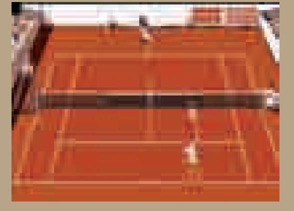
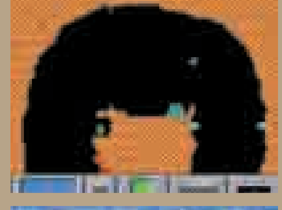


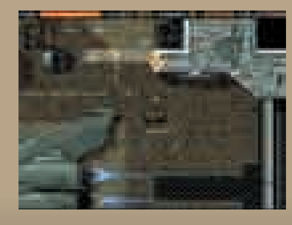
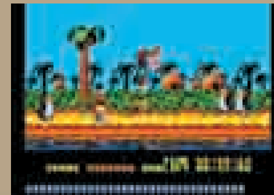






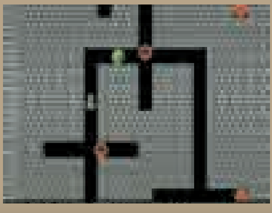
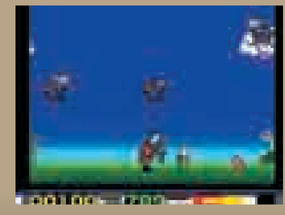


AMIGA





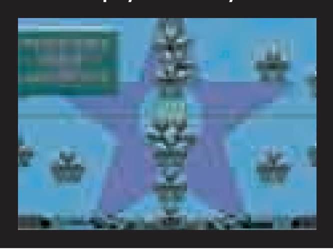
The advanced power of the Amiga 500 meant that it was home to a selection of fantastic games, many of which have never been bettered…

SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE

Developer: **Bitmap Brothers**
Year: **1990**

It seems like we're always harping on about the Bitmap Brothers' classic future sport, but honestly, it's really that good. Nothing can prepare you for the sheer ferocity that a single gruelling match can contain; the action throughout is incredibly fast and frenetic and doesn't let up for a single second. Visuals are extremely well drawn and feature that typical metallic sheen which quickly became the Bitmap's trademark, and who could forget the wonderful shouts for "Ice cream, Ice cream"? If ever there was an instant classic, this was it. You must play this before you die.

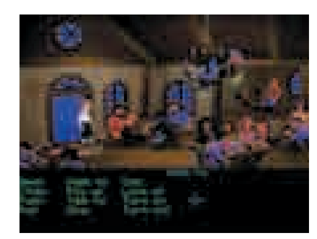


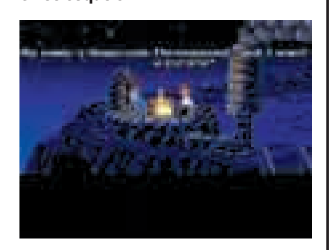


THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND

Developer: **LucasArts**
Year: **1991**

LucasArts' first foray into the world of pirates and treachery is one of its best-loved classics and still proves to be an enjoyable romp today. All of the LucasArts trademarks were in place, from the mind-bending puzzles to the quirky storyline that was made even more enjoyable by the fantastic sense of humour that prevailed throughout. Taking on the role of wannabe pirate Guybrush Threepwood, you soon found yourself immersed in an engaging point-and-click adventure that eventually went on to spawn three sequels.

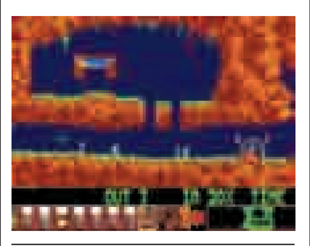




LEMMINGS

Developer: **Psygnosis**
Year: **1991**

Controlling a bunch of suicidal rodents may not sound like fun, but it was sheer gaming heaven. Extremely simple in execution – guide a set number of the little critters to an exit – the fiendish levels took an age to master. *Lemmings* was a massive success and quickly appeared on practically every home system. Although there were many different breeds of Lemming – including Climbers, Blockers and Diggers – nothing was more satisfying than setting a hapless rodent to self-destruct and waiting to hear their customary cries of "Oh No".



▲ It looks easy now, but just you wait…

SENSIBLE SOCCER

Developer: **Sensible Software**
Year: **1991**

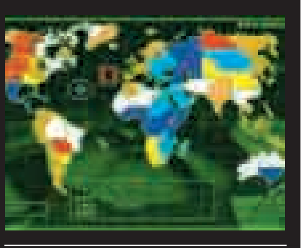
Before *Pro Evo*, this was the title that was considered king of football. It might not look like much now, but in its day, gamers couldn't get enough of *Sensible Software*'s classic interpretation of the beautiful game. Every player was superbly animated and could pull off all manner of shots and passes. There were plenty of updates to ensure that each team was as up-to-date as possible and the gameplay throughout the series was unrivalled. *Sensible Soccer* will always have a special place in our hearts.



SYNDICATE

Developer: **Bullfrog**
Year: **1993**

Bullfrog confirmed its reputation for delivering classic strategy titles with the excellent *Syndicate*. Set in the typical 'not too distant future', the game saw you controlling a squad of four androids in an attempt to wipe out opposing Syndicates. Once your androids were suitably equipped, you could unleash them on the wonderfully detailed 3D isometric settings. Missions were extremely involving and would range from kidnappings to complex assassinations. Above all, though, the game was incredibly violent and great fun.



▲ Ignore the map, this was actually great fun.

ELITE

Developer: **Acornsoft**
Year: **1988**

Whilst many will have fond memories of *Elite* on the early 8-bit computers, the arrival of the Amiga meant that gamers could experience the classic trading game in a whole new way. Ships were now easy to identify (thanks to the power of 16-bit graphics) and *The Blue Danube* finally sounded like it was supposed to. Of course, 16-bit power also meant that the game was now finally able to tear away from its original 32K roots. Though many preferred *Elite*'s sequel, *Frontier*, true aficionados will always swear by the original.



The Great Famicom Giveaway

COMPETITION

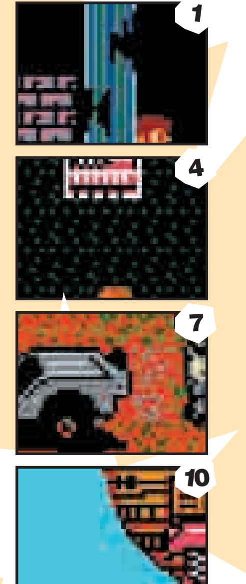
It's the greatest prize ever, so we've come up with a challenge that's harder than the last one…

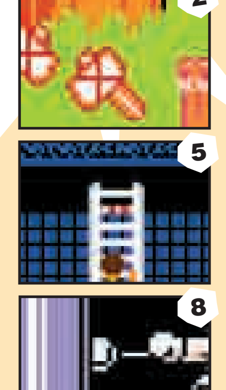
Did you know it's been 20 years since Nintendo released the 8-bit Famicom in Japan? Fancy that, eh? Conceived by ex-Nintendo president Hiroshi Yamauchi, the Japanese Famicom was smaller, more shapely, and finished in an attractive beige and maroon case – much nicer than our grey NESes.

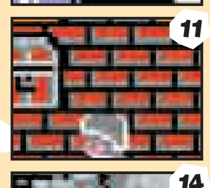
Of course, we couldn't let such a memorable event pass by without some kind of celebration, which is why we've bullied Nintendo into giving us something that any self-respecting gamer would kill for. To commemorate the anniversary of its successful console, Nintendo has issued a thousand special edition Famicom SPs. They're the same design as regular GBA SPs, but finished in the same style as the original Famicom. As you'd expect, these are highly sought-after. Even better, to our knowledge, there's only a single unit currently in the UK – and we've got it.

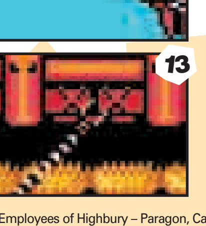
Unfortunately, we've got to give it away, but if you think you're going to prise it from our grasp easily, you're very much mistaken. You'll need to identify the 14 screenshots of popular NES games that are displayed below. Okay, so we've zoomed in to make it a little harder, but we're sure you'll cope…

Once you think you've managed to work out all 14 games, jot them down in an email (along with your name and address) and send it along to gamestm@paragon.co.uk before 30 November, putting the words 'Famicom SP Competition' clearly in the subject line of your email. And don't think you can pull the answers off the Internet either. You can't. Ooh, we're evil.



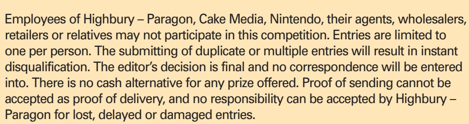












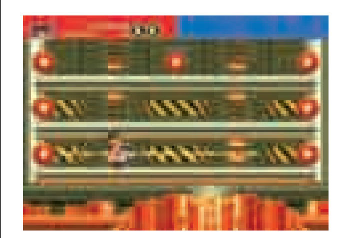
Employees of Highbury – Paragon, Cake Media, Nintendo, their agents, wholesalers, retailers or relatives may not participate in this competition. Entries are limited to one per person. The submitting of duplicate or multiple entries will result in instant disqualification. The editor's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. There is no cash alternative for any prize offered. Proof of sending cannot be accepted as proof of delivery, and no responsibility can be accepted by Highbury – Paragon for lost, delayed or damaged entries.



Greatest RETRO Game Ever



▲ Japanese shooter in 'really rather good' shock. All true, apart from the 'shock' bit.





G•U•N•S•T•A•R H•E•R•O•E•S

Title: **Gunstar Heroes**
Developer: **Treasure**
Format: **Mega Drive**
Release date: **1993**

In 1993 a development team consisting of ex-Konami employees who were tired of making countless sequels released its first ever title. The team in question was Treasure, the game was *Gunstar Heroes* – quite possibly one of the pinnacles of both the Mega Drive's and Treasure's careers.

From the moment Treasure's spinning logo appeared on-screen, you knew you were in for something special. True to form, *Gunstar* boasted an incredible amount of original content both technically and from a gameplay perspective. Upon starting a game, you were given a choice of two standard fighting modes – Free Shot (run and fire at the same time) or Fixed Shot (you could fire in eight directions but were unable to move).

Once you had chosen the first of four selectable levels (form a total of seven), *Gunstar*'s full glory became apparent. Every single level was, quite simply, a masterwork of design. One minute you'd be tearing along in a mine cart (complete with handy anti-gravity ability), the next you'd be racing up the scaffolding of a rocket that was getting ready for take-off. But it was level four's superb board game that was arguably one of the game's most treasured moments.

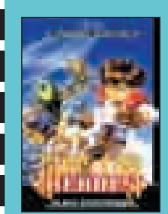
Run to the centre of the screen and a giant dice would fall down. One quick throw later (easier said than done when you're fighting over the dice with your opponent) and you'd soon be moving around the board. Squares would contain extra items, boss encounters or mini puzzles, as well as a dreaded final square that would send you all the way back to the beginning.

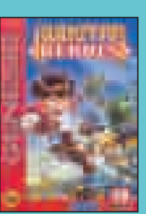
Another unique aspect of *Gunstar* was its firing system. You were initially able to choose between four different weapon types, but by matching up two icons at the top of the screen your base weapon became much more powerful. Combine two different icons and you could create all manner of exotic firepower with which to annihilate your many foes.

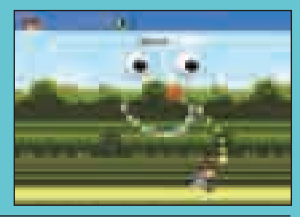
Treasure's masterstroke, however, was the sheer technical flair and inventiveness it put aside for the game's visuals and incredible bosses. Sprite rotation, scaling and parallax scrolling were all used to create amazing levels and gave each boss superb amounts of personality. An excellent soundtrack perfectly complemented the on-screen visuals and helped create one of Treasure's finest moments.

JUST OUR LUCK

The box art for *Gunstar Heroes* is a perfect example of the Western lack of creativity when it comes to selling a game. Japanese gamers got beautiful anime-styled art that perfectly captured the quirkiness of the game (see above). Western owners, on the other hand, got a rather generic pose of the main characters that failed to make it stand out from hordes of other shooters. Bloody typical.







▲ European and American gamers only got generic Westernised box art, rather than anime loveliness.

ATARI 5200

COMMODORE 64

ATARI 400/800

ATARI 600XL

TI99/4A

ATARI 2600

INTELLIVISION

COLECOVISION

EVERYONE HAS THEIR OWN SYSTEM FOR PLAYING POPEYE.*

Atari,* Intellivision,* ColecoVision,* T.I.,* Commodore.* Now you can play POPEYE, one of the most fun and challenging arcade games yet, on any one of them. Run through three screens of non-stop action, where you try to capture Olive Oyl's heart while avoiding untold dangers, including Brutus and the Sea Hag.

Run down to your local store for Popeye today. And while you're there, check out TUTANKHAM,* FROGGER,* Q*bert™ and SUPER COBRA,* also from Parker Brothers' Arcade Action Series.





Popeye (Various Home Systems) Parker Bros, 1984 – American advert



AND YOUR MEMORIES

CALL US NOSTALGIC FOOLS, BUT ARCADES AREN'T WHAT THEY USED TO BE. SO HERE'S OUR GUIDE TO THE WAYS YOU CAN RELIVE THOSE CHERISHED MEMORIES OF YOUTH IN THE PRIVACY OF YOUR OWN HOME

For many gamers there was something magical about standing in a smoke-filled arcade, watching the local hard man chain-smoke his way through 20 Marlboros whilst clocking up an insanely high score on *Defender*.

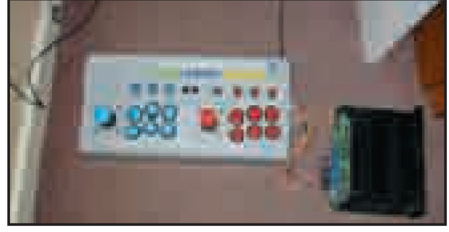
But with arcades now much more family-oriented and old-school gamers now having a bit of disposable income it's little wonder that many 20- and 30-somethings are buying the very machines and games that ate all their ten-pence pieces. Of course, there's a lot more to arcade collecting than simply going into your local specialist store and asking for a mint-condition *Space Invaders* cabinet. Fortunately, we're here to walk you through all the ins and outs of this rapidly expanding hobby.

GUN OR CAB?

There are two ways of bringing the magic of the arcades back into your home. One route is to simply plump for an actual arcade cabinet, the other is to pick up a console known as a Supergun that's designed to play arcade boards. And as you'd expect, both ways have their own strengths and weaknesses.

The greatest advantage of a Supergun is its size and handy ability to be used on a standard TV (as long as your TV is NTSC compatible). Often

SE SELF



▲ This Supergun might not look like much, but it's the path to arcade joy.

extremely compact, a Supergun can be easily stored and taken out whenever it's needed, unlike a full-size arcade cabinet. It's also possible to wire all manner of different joysticks up to a Supergun, so if you're not happy with the ones supplied you can always use a PSone or SNES pad, or even a Dreamcast arcade stick. While it would be possible to use pads from current consoles, their reliance on rumble features and analogue buttons would mean that they'd require plenty of extra circuitry to get working and, as a result, are best left to the experts.

While Superguns are generally considered a good place to start, they're also used by experts as test rigs due to the fact that they allow much easier access to a PCB board than a standard cabinet. A real connoisseur will often skip the Supergun and go straight to the cabinets they remember using in their youth. But a whole host of pitfalls are waiting to catch out the unwary or overeager buyer, so a cautious approach needs to be taken.

STOP QUIT, JAMMA TIME

One of the most common cabinets available is the standard three-button JAMMA cab. They're relatively easy to get hold of and can be bought reasonably cheaply, providing that you go for a generic, mass-produced model. Cabinets, however, do have many more disadvantages when compared to Superguns. They're incredibly heavy, can take up a huge amount of floorspace and, if you're after a specific machine, can work out to be horrifically expensive. If you do have a millionaire's mansion, though, it's definitely the machine of choice, as not even a Supergun can recreate the tactile joy of standing up in front of your very own machine.

Once you've chosen your machine, the next task is to get some games for it. JAMMA is by far the most common type of board. The name stands for Japanese Amusement Machine Manufacturer's Association, and any JAMMA board can be used in a JAMMA-compatible cabinet. JAMMA itself didn't come into production until 1986 when it was created in an attempt to bring some standardisation to the arcade scene, so early titles like *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man* are not initially compatible. Fortunately, these games and many others can be converted to JAMMA using a loom, which is a collection of wires used to connect PCB boards to JAMMA cabinets. ▷

TONY RYDER
MANAGER OF RAVEN GAMES

How long have you been making Superguns and what are their benefits over arcade machines?

We have been making the Supergun for around 12 years. After seeing how poor the original Hong Kong machines were, we decided to make our own. The Supergun's biggest benefit is its size – it's roughly the size of a PlayStation and you simply plug the PCBs into it. Cabinets are great if you have the room but it's hard to find new ones nowadays.

What's the demand like for Superguns and PCB boards in general?

For us, it's our best-selling machine, with the Atari Jaguar second. Customers don't come to us for PlayStation2s or Xboxes as they can be bought from the high street.

What do you feel about the easy access to emulations like MAME on the PC and Xbox? Are gamers favouring it over proper collecting?

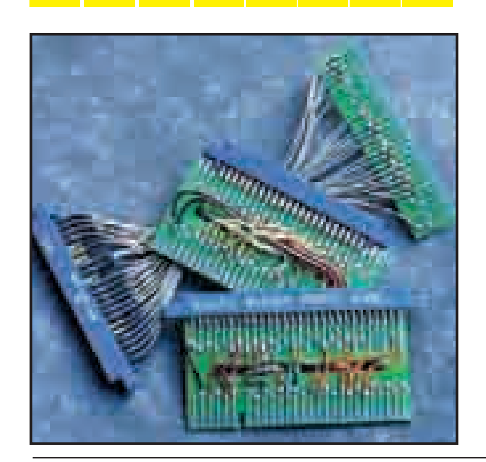
No, not at all. MAME is a great way to see a load of old games you might never have had the chance to play before, but it can sometimes suffer from various problems like poor sound. You tend to find that the true collectors prefer the original PCBs. Playing on a PC is also nothing like playing the same game with an arcade joystick.

What are the most requested PCB boards and how often do they appear?

Top sellers tend to be *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, The Simpsons, Splatter House, Golden Axe, Aliens* and *R-Type*. Games like *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* and *Strider* are now very rare, due to the fact that when *Street Fighter II* became so popular many of the CPS boards were destroyed to make copy clone boards.



AMUSE YOURSELF





▲ That up there on the left is a loom, which you'll need if you want to play certain games. Or you could buy some full-size cabinets. Hey, it's your money.

With later games requiring more than three buttons it's necessary to buy a harness in order to wire up the additional buttons. Looms or harnesses are also needed if you wish to use later board designs such as the Neo Geo MVS or SEGA's 32-bit ST-V hardware (basically a Saturn-based PCB). Arcade collectors also face other problems like the dreaded 'suicide battery', a limited-life battery found on many CPS2 boards and on SEGA PCBs like *Golden Axe* and *Shinobi*. Fortunately, this and many other problems can now be easily fixed, providing that you know where to go.

Thanks to the wonder of the Internet, solutions for fixing and buying games and machines are now only a few clicks away. There are many dedicated sites around, but few contain the sheer wealth of knowledge of UK-VAC, the United Kingdom's Video Arcade Collector's mailing list. Log onto http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ukvac/ and you'll find an incredibly passionate group of gamers and collectors who can't wait to share their collective knowledge with you. You'll often find items for sale (and plenty of 'wanted' boards and accessories), as well as UK-based advice. Such is their passion and devotion to their hobby they even went so far as to lend many of the exhibits that appeared at last year's 'Game On' exhibition.

GOT DEEP POCKETS?

Now you've made a few decisions, it's simply a case of spending your hard-earned cash. A decent Supergun will cost you around £150 and will normally come supplied with at least one joystick. Cabinets, on the other hand, can cost anything from £100 to a couple of grand, normally due to the fact that the machines are so much older and harder to come by.

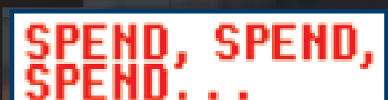
It's unsurprising to learn that the likes of *Space Invaders*, *Defender* and *Galaxian*, along with other classics from the mid-Seventies to early Eighties, can end up costing the unwary buyer huge amounts of cash. Indeed, a mint *Defender* cabinet (very hard to find in a decent condition because so many show up with cigarette burns on them) can set you back as much as £2,000. Providing you look in the right places, however, it's sometimes possible to pick up some good bargains.

One of your first choices is eBay, and though prices can vary according to demand, you're often able to pick up a few choice boards for less than £50. There are also plenty of websites dedicated to selling cabinets, Superguns and games, often at very reasonable prices. The likes of www.ravengames.co.uk, www.andys-arcade.net and www.arcadewarehouse.com are all good places to start looking. Be warned, however, as these guys know their stuff and it's unlikely you'll pick up a mint-condition *Space Invaders* for anything less than its actual asking price.

Your last option is to trawl round the many amusement arcades across the country. Although the more popular areas have long been cleaned out by other collectors, it's still possible to come across the odd shop which is more than willing to sell cabinets or boards for a decent price and clear some much-needed (and valuable) space at the same time.

PLAY TIME

After you've saved then spent your hard-earned cash you're ready to revisit one of the most satisfying and enjoyable eras in gaming. But if you find that this golden age of arcade history isn't quite what you were expecting and decide to sell your recently purchased *Pac-Man* machine or that fancy *Space Invaders* cocktail cabinet, you'll find our offices very accommodating…



While it's possible to pick up certain games relatively cheaply, others will cost you the proverbial arm and a leg. These are a few of the choicest titles.

SPACE INVADERS COCKTAIL CABINET
DEVELOPER: Taito
PRICE: £1,050
For many this is still the daddy of all shooters, but if you want to recreate the joy of blowing up your own bases and hitting that elusive UFO you're going to need over £1,000.

GALAXIAN
DEVELOPER: Midway
PRICE: £995
***Galaxian* was the first colour arcade game and yet another extremely popular shoot-'em-up. Frantic gameplay, devilishly tricky attack waves and a snazzy-looking cabinet mean this is well worth the £1,000 asking price.**

DEFENDER
DEVELOPER: Williams
PRICE: £1,495
Only the most hard-core gamers would tackle *Defender* when it was first released in 1980. A multitude of different buttons, incredibly fast gameplay and some frenetic blasting made sure that *Defender* definitely sorted out the men from the boys.

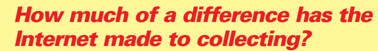
DONKEY KONG
DEVELOPER: Nintendo
PRICE: £400
Miyamoto-san's original classic costs mere peanuts when compared to the likes of *Defender* and *Pac-Man*. Mario's first ever adventure is still as playable as it ever was and is a must-have for platform fans.

PAC-MAN
DEVELOPER: Midway
PRICE: £1,600
The original videogame hero is getting extremely hard to pin down nowadays, so it's hardly surprising to learn that *Pac-Man* is one of the most expensive machines you can buy.

ALAN TYLER

Arcade collector and fine art lecturer

▲ Alan Tyler in pensive mood. Thinking about games or some sort of soldering device we reckon.



▼ Why have dull necessities like a fridge or, say, a dialysis machine, when you could have one of these beauties in your house.

What made you want to start collecting arcade machines and how long have you been collecting?

I'm a bit of a collector of 'stuff' at the best of times, and I started out collecting game PCBs and machines that I remembered from my formative years, like *Defender*, *Galaxian*, *Space Invaders*, *Asteroids*, *Phoenix* and the like. But as time has passed, I've actually got into earlier game technology – early to mid-Seventies black and white stuff, like Atari's *Starship-1*, Midway's *Sea Wolf*, *Tank* and so on. Like many people, I started out with a single JAMMA cab, although I soon realised that I wanted more, and it's amazing what's out there once you start to look. I've found stuff in people's garden sheds, in barns and stables – all over the place!

How much of a difference has the Internet made to collecting?

There's an amazing knowledge base out there and people are always willing to share what they know in order to keep these machines going. The web has made such a difference to this hobby. Ten years ago it was like some kind of lost art – no one knew anything about these machines or where to get spares. Machines would be trashed purely because they had little or no residual value once they stopped working. Nowadays people are so



▲ Not as glamorous as a cabinet, but it gets the job done.

much better informed and stuff has been (or is being) saved. There are also a lot of people around now who repair arcade machines and PCBs.

What do you think of the arcades of today, and why do you think they have changed so much?

I have no great interest in contemporary arcades. I still occasionally visit arcades, but they do very little for me. Current machines often offer something more physically experiential or simulation-oriented rather than just good solid gameplay and it pretty much leaves me cold. I wonder if the resurgence of interest in retro gaming hasn't been some kind of reaction to this. Are people sick of effects-laden novelty and now want to return to a purer form of gameplay?

MALCOLM LAURIE

Arcade collector and web designer

What made you want to start collecting arcade machines and how long have you been collecting?

Ever since I first played *Galaxian* in 1980 I knew that I would want to start collecting cabinets for myself. I started with a Supergun and a few PCB boards, but over the last few years have now collected many cabinets, much to the chagrin of my wife.

What are the pros and cons of cabinets compared to Superguns?

Superguns are relatively inexpensive and small, but aren't quite as good as the real thing. For a long time, though, it was all I could afford and all I had space for. To me, standing up playing a beautifully designed cabinet, wrenching the joysticks in a sweaty, psychotic manner simply can't be beaten. The main downside to cabinets is the sheer size and weight of them, especially if you start collecting in earnest.

What's your favourite machine?

Galaxian! The first arcade game I played and



▲ Malcolm with the love of his life (sorry, Mrs Laurie…).

it's also the first full-size dedicated arcade cabinet that I acquired. Absolutely timeless and still fantastically compulsive, *Galaxian* sparked a lifelong love of shoot-'em-ups.

How do you feel about the fact that so many arcade games are now emulated?

Personally, I think it's great. It lets people play many games that simply aren't available to play anywhere else and would otherwise have disappeared forever. For me, it allows me to discover games I'd never heard of before.



GAMES THAT TIME FORGOT...



MAGIC CARPET

Take to the skies on a magical mystery tour...

Bullfrog's *Magic Carpet* was quite unlike any other game when it was released in 1995. A world away from the likes of *Populous* and *Powermonger*, *Magic Carpet* saw you taking on the role of an apprentice wizard whose task was to restore balance to a shattered world. Taking control of the titular carpet, the game involved flying around an impressive 3D world and collecting globes of a substance called Mana from various sources, while guarding your castle and settlements. Mana could be found by exploring, but your best option was to earn it by attacking the monsters on each stage.

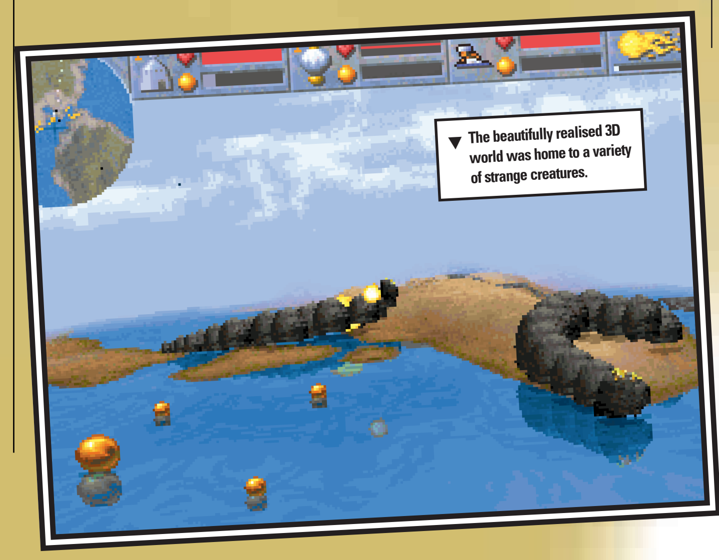
As to be expected of a Bullfrog title, your opponents' AI was of an extremely high level. Swarms of bees would doggedly pursue you, while immense fire-breathing dragons could send your carpet crashing into the ground. In all, there were 13 foes to battle and all required plenty of bombardment before succumbing to your firepower.

As impressive as these beasts were, it was the rival wizards that would cause you the most trouble. Fast, dangerous and able to learn from your tactics, all of your skills were tested to their limits whenever an opposing sorcerer revealed himself. Luckily, your standard Fireballs could be boosted by over 20 different spells. Some of the more impressive ones would deliver spectacular results that twisted and charred the landscape beyond recognition, and let you face your opponents on more even terms.

Earthquakes would cause the ground below you to crack and split, creating huge fissures, while rustling up a volcano would cause the ground to spew forth volcanic rocks. Every spell took place in real-time and was a sight to behold, but all this graphical destruction came at a price. Flinging around spells with gay abandon may have spectacularly rearranged the scenery, but it also seriously depleted your Mana source. Thus *Magic Carpet* became a subtle balancing act where you would have to carefully gauge how you would go about defeating each new set of dangerous foes.

This balancing act extended to your castle too, and although cautious gamers would stick close to their bases and deal with anything that approached, it simply allowed your rival's own fortress to build in power. Thus you would need to constantly defend and attack in equal measure.

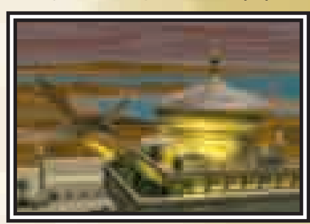
Magic Carpet delivered stunning visuals and successfully married them to some captivating gameplay. The end result was groundbreaking and was enough to convince Sony and SEGA to port the title to the Saturn and PSone. Imagine what an update could look like today…



▼ The beautifully realised 3D world was home to a variety of strange creatures.



▼ You had to be sure to defend your property. 'Dragon attack' rarely fools insurance people.



Presentation	88%
Graphics	95%
Playability	93%
Longevity	94%
OVERALL	93%

Great RETRO Gaming Moments



O•U•T R•U•N

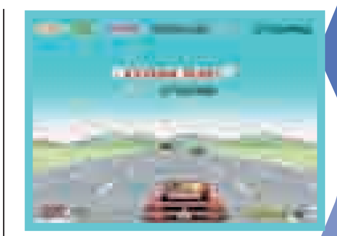
Format(s): **Arcade (first), Amiga, Amstrad, Spectrum, Commodore, Atari ST, Genesis**
Publisher: **SEGA**
Developer: **SEGA**
Release date: **1986 (Arcade)**

The sun's gleaming off your recently polished Ferrari, your best girl sits beside you and *Magical Sound Shower* pumps through your speakers, gaming doesn't get much better than this. There were plenty of stand-out moments in Yu Suzuki's *Out Run*, but few could be prepared for the transition that saw *Out Run* tear away from its competitors and leave everything else eating its dust.

We are of course talking about Suzuki san's ingenious decision to allow you to choose your own route through the game. Previous racers had stuck to the generic formula of simply following a set course – the release of *Out Run*, however, changed everything…

Eager gamers who were already





feeling every slide and turn thanks to *Out Run*'s hydraulic cabinet quickly realised that Suzuki-san's latest creation captured the sheer speed and beauty of all-out racing like nothing before it. Broad curves and tight S-bends quickly gave way to a glorious stretch of road that initially seemed to go on forever.

Suddenly, though, a huge sign appeared above the road ahead of you and blind panic (and sheer magic) set in as you quickly realised that the road was branching off into two. Precious seconds were usually lost at this moment, as many gamers would lose control at having to make a split-second decision at 290 kmh. If you failed to make the checkpoint in time, *Out Run*'s next stroke of magic was revealed to you…

The whole glorious game was mapped out and showed not only your meagre progress, but also showed you five alternative routes. Gamers forgot their previous poor performance and quickly fed the machine another ten-pence piece. *Out Run*'s iconic status was sealed.

▼ For a kiddy-looking game, Walrus Pete was a surprisingly hard boss to beat.

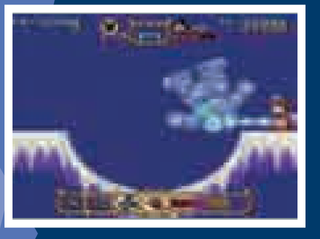


M•A•G•I•C•A•L Q•U•E•S•T

Format: **Super Nintendo**
Publisher: **Capcom**
Developer: **Capcom**
Release date: **1992**

It's not very often that a gruelling fight with a tough boss can make us laugh out loud, but that's exactly what happens whenever we go up against Walrus Pete.

***Mickey's Magical Quest* had already seen him fend off Mode 7 rotating spiders, massive multi-segmented snakes and Mach 1 flying eagles, but the best was yet to come. After negotiating various terrains, including gloomy forests and hazardous mountains, you eventually found yourself in**



Walrus Pete's icy domain. Using your trusty Fireman Suit, it was then a simple case of navigating the straightforward level to reach Pete's personal ice rink. Beating Pete himself, however, was another matter entirely.

Walrus Pete quickly took to the icy slopes and proceeded to flip and spin around in all his Mode 7 glory. He was no walkover and had many tricks up his sleeve to ensure that your courageous mouse got no further in his quest to find Pluto. Huge snowballs were Pete's main weapon of choice and he threw them with deadly accuracy. Fortunately, your hose was able to freeze the projectiles that could then be used against Pete himself.

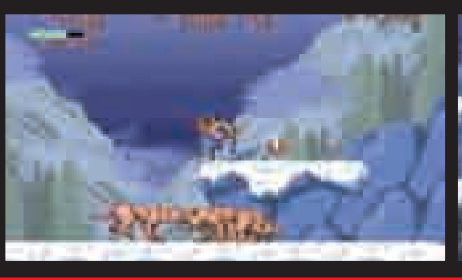
After that it was simply a case of staying out of the big brute's way until you had managed to turn him into a popsicle. His erratic movement patterns may have meant that he was a tricky customer to defeat, but you can be sure that you'll have a smile on your face while you're attempting it.

Step-by-Step

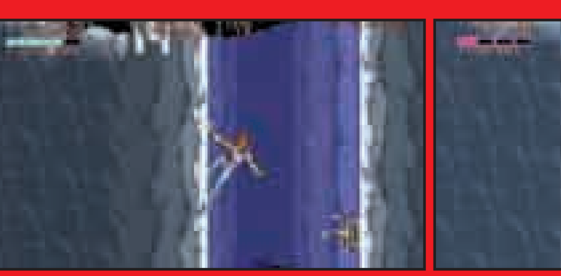
This Month: STRIDER

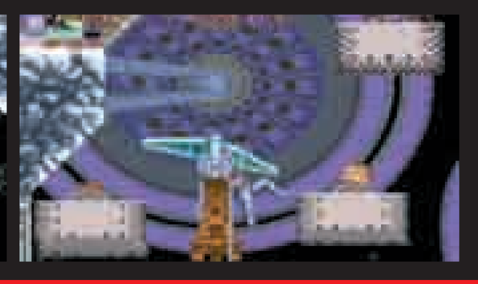


STEP 1-3
Starting off in Siberia, your first task is to avoid the many wolves and grab that handy Sword Enhancer. Pick it up then slide under the door before it closes.



STEP 7-9
Your next task is to negotiate this tunnel – watch out for any debris from the dead gorilla, then quickly make your way to the top of the shaft. It's almost too easy…

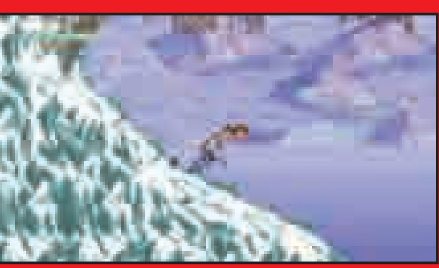


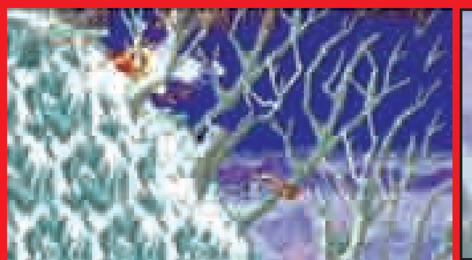


STEP 13-15
This guy is quite tricky because he constantly shifts around. Your best bet is to jump towards him, then attack at the last moment. Careful how you go, because there's more to come.



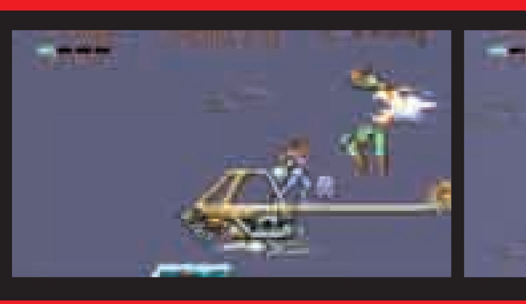
STEP 16-18
No time to rest. Run down the mountainside as quickly as you can. Avoid the mines and watch out for that gaping chasm at the bottom – it can catch out unwary gamers.

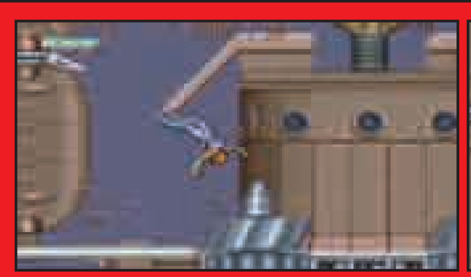






STEP 22-24
You need to be on your toes here as lots of bombs constantly drop from the sky. Make your way across the skiffs and watch out for the airship's propeller – it can do some damage.

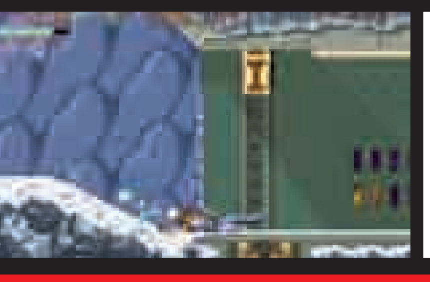






STEP 28-30
Take out this trio of lovely (but oh-so-deadly) ladies and make your way to the control room. Muster all your strength to kill the guard and the level's completed. Nice one.

Every month, we'll take a look at a classic game and give you a walkthrough guide to a specific stage. Our first candidate is the second level of Capcom's Strider



STEP 4-6
He may look tough, but this metal gorilla is a walkover. Simply hammer away at him until he bursts into flames.

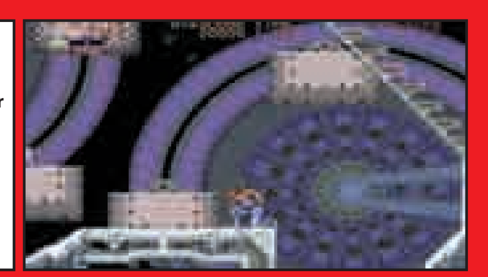


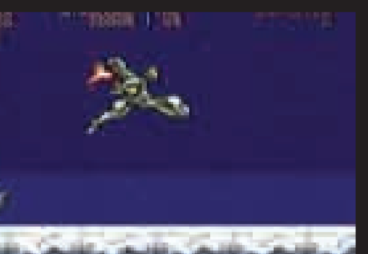


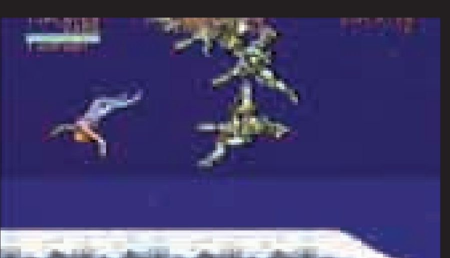




STEP 10-12
As soon as you get into this cog room make your way to the land side. Avoiding the spiked platforms, grab as much energy as possible then make your way to the mid-level boss.



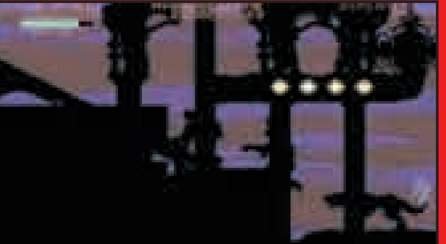


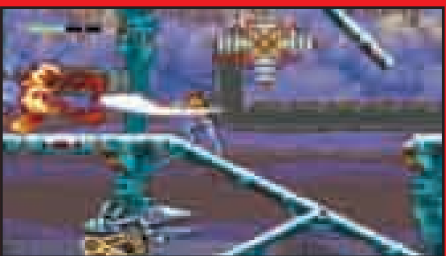




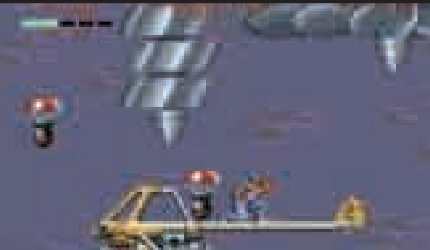


STEP 19-21
You'll now find yourself in a power station (complete with intermittent blackouts). Carefully make your way to the top of the station and make sure you grab the extra life.



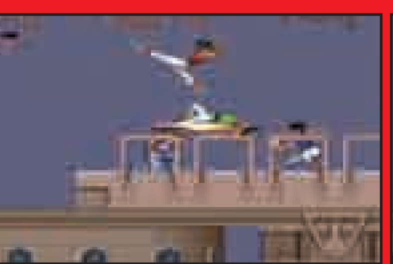


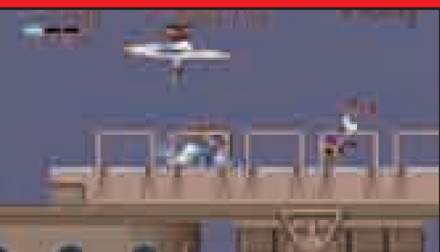


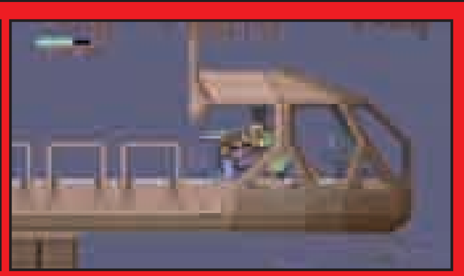


STEP 25-27
Jump over the turbines and then find this handy spot in front of the gun emplacement. From this relatively safe haven you can fire at your foes at leisure – handy, eh?











C·L·A·S·S·I·C C·O·N·S·O·L·E

B·U·Y·E·R·S G·U·I·D·E Q·U·I·C·K R·E·F·E·R·E·N·C·E

BUYERS GUIDE

It might be easy to play retro games through emulation, but there's nothing quite like owning the original system – that musty smell of ancient electronics can never really be replicated with a PC. Of course, there's always a price to pay and unscrupulous dealers are out to make a quick buck, but you really don't have to pay through the nose if you look in the right places. Charity shops, car boot sales and eBay are all good places to start, but before you do, use our guide to see how much you should be paying…

3DO

Panasonic 3DO	£60
Goldstar 3DO	£50-60

ACORN COMPUTERS

BBC Micro	£50
Acorn Electron	£40

AMSTRAD

Amstrad CPC 464	£20
Amstrad CPC 664	£20-25
Amstrad CPC 6128	£25
Amstrad GX4000	£50

ATARI

Atari VCS 2600	£30 (wooden models tend to cost more)
Atari ST	£40 (with software)
Atari Lynx	£35 (the original model costs less)
Atari Jaguar	£25

COMMODORE

Commodore Vic 20	£15-20
Commodore 64	£25-35 (varies according to model)
Commodore Amiga	£35-40 (varies according to model)
Commodore CDTV	£50-60
C64GS	£50 (becoming more sought-after)
Commodore CD32	£35

MISC

GCE Vectrex (General Consumer Electronics)	£200-250
MB Vectrex (Milton Bradley)	£175-200
JAMMA compatible cabinets	£100-350 (depending on model)
Supergun	£150-200 (varies according to model)

NEC

PC Engine	£70-80
Turbo Grafx-16	£50-60
Turbo Duo	£100-150
PC Engine GT	£150-200
Super Grafx	£200-250

NINTENDO

Game & Watch	£15-50 (depending on title)
Nintendo Entertainment System	£15-20
Game Boy/Game Boy Pocket	£10
Game Boy Color	£15
Super Nintendo	£20-25
Virtual Boy	£75-100
Nintendo 64	£20-25

SEGA

Master System	£20
Mega Drive	£20-25
Game Gear	£35-40
Mega CD	£40-60
SEGA 32X	£30
SEGA Nomad	£75-100
SEGA Saturn	£30
Dreamcast	£25-30

SINCLAIR

Sinclair ZX-81	£40
ZX Spectrum 48K	£40-50
ZX Spectrum +	£30
ZX Spectrum 128K	£40
ZX Spectrum +2	£35
ZX Spectrum +3	£40

SNK

Neo Geo MVS Single Slot (Arcade system) (prices for multi-slots are higher)	£70
Neo Geo AES (home system)	£175-225
Neo Geo CD	£125-175
Neo Geo CDZ	£150-175
Neo Geo Pocket Color	£40-50

CONSOLE OF THE MONTH



- NAME: Commodore Amiga
- PRICE: £35-40 (according to model)
- THREE OF THE BEST:
  Alien Breed (est. price £6)
  Blood Brothers (est. price £4)
  Colonization (est. price £6)
- In its heyday, the Amiga offered a decent set of work-related programs as well as a selection of fine games. Still a great machine.

HOW TO USE GTM

SELLING

To sell items on GTM, simply list the following details in an email to: gtm@paragon.co.uk

- Your name
- Your age (you must be over 18)
- Your home address and telephone number (don't worry – this is strictly confidential and will not be given out)
- Your email address
- The item(s) you wish to sell (no more than five per month please)
- The condition of the item(s) you wish to sell
- How much you want for the item(s)

Each item will then be allocated a lot number and listed on GTM, along with your region in the UK.

BUYING

To buy an item from GTM, all you have to do is list the following details in an email to: gtm@paragon.co.uk

- Your name
- Your age (you must be over 18)
- Your home address and telephone number (don't worry – this is strictly confidential and will not be given out)
- Your email address
- The reference number for the item you're interested in

WANTED

If you're simply trying to get hold of a long-desired item, contact us in the same way as above stating what you want and any preferences on its condition or price.

After contacting us, your email address will be passed onto the relevant seller or buyer, who will contact you directly to complete the deal, arrange payment and make plans for postage, collection or delivery. Please note that this runs on a first come, first served basis

GTM RULES AND SMALL PRINT

This is a service for private sellers, not dealers. GTM is for sales of retro games only – no post-Dreamcast consoles or games allowed. There's little point in advertising Mega Drive *FIFA* games as everybody already has at least two copies. Paragon Publishing Ltd cannot take any responsibility for items lost or broken in the post

BUY & SELL your retro games with games™

G.T.M.

GAMES TRADING MARKET

Searching for an elusive copy of Radiant Silvergun? Want to sell that pile of Spectrum games taking up space around the house? Then check out GTM, the most authentic retro sales column in the world.



FOR SALE

Lot 28 – *Jungle Strike* for SEGA Mega Drive. Boxed and instructions, good condition. £3 plus p+p. North Yorks

Lot 29 – *Moonwalker* for SEGA Mega Drive. Boxed and instructions, good condition. £3 plus p+p. North Yorks

Lot 30 – *Rock 'N Roll Racing* for SEGA Mega Drive. Boxed and instructions, good condition. £3 plus p+p. North Yorks

Lot 31 – Neo-Geo Pocket Color and six games including *Metal Slug* and *Sonic*. Boxed as new. £80. Warwickshire

Lot 32 – *Arcade* games mags. All 12 issues. £20. Warwickshire

Lot 33 – *Get Bass* for SEGA Dreamcast, Japanese version. Boxed with fishing rod in mint condition. £40

Lot 34 – *House Of The Dead 2* for SEGA Dreamcast, Japanese version. Boxed with gun in mint condition. £35

Lot 35 – *Seaman* for SEGA Dreamcast, USA version. Boxed with mic in mint condition. £30

Lot 36 – *The King Of Fighters '99 Dream Match*, Japanese version. Boxed in mint condition. £20

Lot 37 – *Capcom Vs. SNK* for SEGA Dreamcast, Japanese version. Boxed in mint condition. £20



Lot 38 – *Garou: Mark Of The Wolves* for Neo-Geo AES, Japanese version. Boxed in very good condition. £260. Sussex

Lot 39 – *Terranigma* for SNES, PAL version. Boxed in very good condition. £80. Sussex

Lot 40 – *Elite Plus* for Amiga, PAL version. Boxed with instructions, good condition. £2 plus p+p. North Yorks

Lot 41 – *Rocket Ranger* for Amiga, PAL version. Boxed with instructions, good condition. £1 plus p+p. North Yorks

Lot 42 – *Golden Axe 3* for SEGA Mega Drive, Japanese version. Boxed with instructions, good condition. £8 plus p+p. North Yorks

Lot 43 – *Shining In The Darkness* for SEGA Mega Drive, PAL version. Boxed with instructions, good condition. £4.50 plus p+p. North Yorks

Lot 44 –*ToeJam & Earl* for SEGA Mega Drive, PAL version. Boxed with instructions, good condition. £6 plus p+p. North Yorks

WANTED

WANTED 08 – *King Of Fighters 2000* (English) for Neo-Geo AES. Must be in good working order and complete with box and manual. Exeter

WANTED 09 – *Last Resort* for Neo-Geo AES. Must be in good working order and with box and manual. Exeter

WANTED 10 – *Miracle Piano* teaching cartridge for NES (UK version). Must be in good working order. Suffolk

WANTED 11 – *Dragon(s) Crystal* for SEGA Game Gear. Preferably with box and instructions. Manchester

WANTED 12 – *Azure Dreams* for Sony PlayStation. Must be boxed and with instructions. Manchester

WANTED 13 – *Vandal Hearts* for Sony PlayStation. Must have box and instructions. Manchester

WANTED 14 – *Panzer Dragoon Saga* for SEGA Saturn. Must have box and instructions. Manchester

WANTED 15 – *Panzer Dragoon Mini* for SEGA Game Gear. Must have box and instructions. Poole

WANTED 18 – *Chrono Trigger* for Super Nintendo. Preferably with box and instructions. Will pay up to £70. Londonderry, NI

WANTED 19 – WonderSwan dating games. Must be in good condition with boxes and instructions. Surrey

WANTED 20 – *King Of Fighters '95* (Jap or USA version) for Neo-Geo AES. Must be boxed with manual. Derbyshire

WANTED 21 – SEGA Mega CD Mark 1 (PAL version). Must be boxed, complete and in excellent condition. Willing to pay up to £40. West Mids

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SUPER COBRA (Atari 2600/5200, Intellivision, Coleco Vision) Parker Brothers, 1983 – US advertisement


eMag

ESSENTIALS

TOO MANY GAMES, NOT ENOUGH MONEY. THANKFULLY, NOT ALL OF THEM ARE WORTH SPENDING YOUR HARD-EARNED CASH ON. IF YOU WANT TO TASTE THE CREAM OF THE CROP, YOU'VE COME TO THE RIGHT PLACE…

PLAYSTATION2

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Sony

UK LAUNCH DATE
24 November 2000

MEDIA
4.75-inch DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£169.99

The oldest of the next-generation consoles, having had well over a year's head start over both the GameCube and Xbox. With support across the board from third-party developers, a built-in DVD player and backward compatibility with older PSone games, it's the most popular videogame console available today.



TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE PLAYSTATION2 GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Ico	SCEE	In-House
2	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
3	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical
4	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neversoft
5	Pro Evolution Soccer 3	Konami	In-House
6	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion
7	Dark Chronicle IMPORT	Sony	In-House
8	Rez	SEGA	UGA
9	Amplitude	Sony	Harmonix
10	Devil May Cry	Capcom	In-House
11	Suikoden III IMPORT	Konami	In-House
12	Metal Slug 3 IMPORT	Playmore	In-House
13	Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts	Io Interactive
14	NBA Street 2	Electronic Arts	EA Sports BIG
15	Colin McRae Rally 04	Codemasters	In-House
16	Project Zero	Wanadoo	Tecmo
17	Ape Escape 2	Sony	In-House
18	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive
19	XGRA	Acclaim	In-House
20	Virtua Fighter 4 Evolution	SEGA	AM2

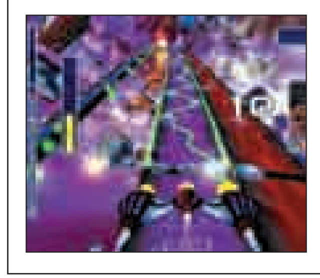
VIEWPOINT
FREEDOM FIGHTERS

Surprised that EA could come up with something as impressive and original as this? Don't be – thanks to the talents of developer Io Interactive, *Freedom Fighters* is a real gem of a game. Who needs realism when you've got arcade action, eh?



VIEWPOINT
AMPLITUDE

And it's about time too. We've been enjoying the delights of *Amplitude* for months now, so it's nice to know that now you can too. Of course, if you ever catch us online it's best just to run away – we've had far too much practice at it for our own good.



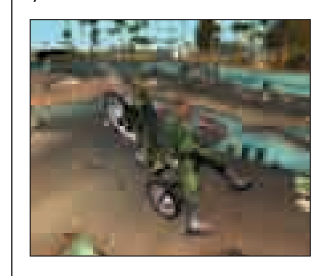
VIEWPOINT
COLIN MCRAE RALLY 04

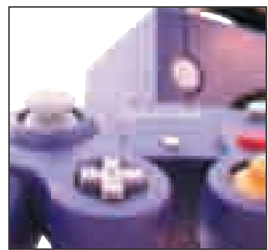
Another year, another great *Colin McRae* game from those geniuses at Codemasters – did you really expect anything less? Not surprisingly, it's better than ever and if it wasn't for a slightly patchy multiplayer mode is quite possibly the best rally game we've seen.



VIEWPOINT
FREESTYLE METALX

While not good enough to make it onto our 'must-have' list, Midway's attempt to create *Tony Hawk* on a bike still deserves a nod – mainly because it's just good, wholesome fun. If you're aching for some motocross action, you could do worse than this.






GAMECUBE

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Nintendo

UK LAUNCH DATE
3 May 2002

MEDIA
3-inch Optical Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£129.99

Though the GameCube seems destined to struggle, Nintendo's box of delights is still worth a look. Admittedly, third-party support is rapidly dwindling, but you only have to look at the first-party releases to appreciate the quality gaming on offer. Nintendo still makes some of the finest games you'll ever play and missing out on them isn't an option.

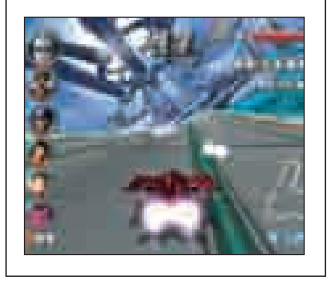


TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE GAMECUBE GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Metroid Prime	Nintendo	In-House
2	The Legend Of Zelda: The Wind Waker	Nintendo	In-House
3	F-Zero GX IMPORT	Nintendo	Amusement Vision
4	Winning Eleven 6: Final Evolution IMPORT	Konami	In-House
5	Super Monkey Ball 2	SEGA	Amusement Vision
6	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical
7	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	In-House
8	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neversoft
9	Ikaruga	Treasure	In-House
10	Super Mario Sunshine	Nintendo	In-House
11	Eternal Darkness	Nintendo	Silicon Knights
12	Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House
13	Mario Golf: Toadstool Tour IMPORT	Nintendo	Camelot
14	Resident Evil	Capcom	In-House
15	Resident Evil Zero	Capcom	In-House
16	Mario Party 4	Nintendo	Hudson
17	Viewtiful Joe IMPORT	Capcom	In-House
18	Skies Of Arcadia Legends	SEGA	Overworks
19	Star Wars: Rogue Leader	Activision	Factor 5
20	Animal Crossing IMPORT	Nintendo	In-House

VIEWPOINT
F-ZERO GX

Okay, so it might not be the massive leap forward that everyone might have hoped for, but when it comes to polish there's nothing slicker than SEGA's update to the classic franchise. We're still trying to dominate those Diamond courses…



VIEWPOINT
MARIO GOLF: TOADSTOOL TOUR

Those of you who like your golf realistic, turn the page now, there's nothing for you here. If, on the other hand, you like to have fun while ruining a good walk, then *Mario Golf* is a must. Shame it's not out here until next year.



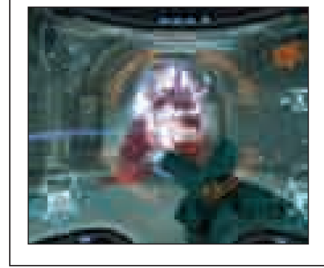
VIEWPOINT
FINAL FANTASY: CRYSTAL CHRONICLES

Yes, we're gluttons for punishment. Not able to wait until the US release in February, we're already plugging through the Japanese version of Square's GC opus – and we haven't the foggiest what's going on.



VIEWPOINT
METROID PRIME

Don't ask us why, but this month we were overcome with a sudden urge to revisit one of the greatest games on the GameCube to date. And you know what? It's still as great as ever. Plus it gave us the excuse to play the NES version all day long. Bliss.



ESSENTIALS

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XBOX

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Microsoft

UK LAUNCH DATE
13 March 2002

MEDIA
4.75-inch DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£129.99

Despite a slow start, the Xbox is swiftly becoming one of the major players in today's console market. Suggestions that the machine is only 'a PC in a box' are founded upon the built-in hard drive, broadband support and DVD player. However, the Xbox is far more accessible to the casual gamer than most PCs.



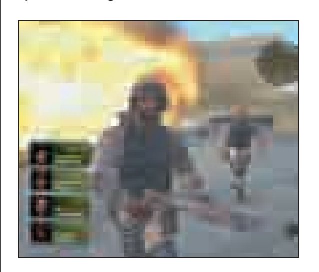


TOP TWENTY MUST-HAVE XBOX GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Halo	Microsoft	Bungie
2	Panzer Dragoon Orta	SEGA	Smilebit
3	Jet Set Radio Future	SEGA	Smilebit
4	TimeSplitters 2	Eidos	Free Radical
5	Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	In-House
6	Star Wars: Knights Of The Old Republic	Activision	BioWare
7	Project Gotham Racing	Microsoft	Bizarre Creations
8	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Activision	Neversoft
9	Project Zero	Microsoft	Tecmo
10	Burnout 2: Point Of Impact	Acclaim	Criterion Studios
11	Dead Or Alive 3	Microsoft	Tecmo
12	Soul Calibur II	Namco	In-House
13	XGRA	Acclaim	In-House
14	Moto GP	THQ	Climax
15	Hitman 2: Silent Assassin	Eidos	Io Interactive
16	Aggressive Inline	Acclaim	Z-Axis
17	Freedom Fighters	Electronic Arts	Io Interactive
18	Colin McRae Rally 04	CodeMasters	In-House
19	Wakeboarding Unleashed	Activision	Shaba Games
20	Tiger Woods 2004	Electronic Arts	In-House

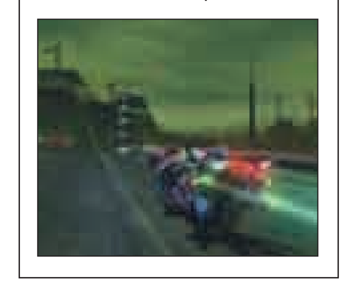
VIEWPOINT
CONFLICT: DESERT STORM 2

Even though much of our time has been spent with *Freedom Fighters* this month, we still appreciate a bit of desert combat now and then – hence the appearance of *Conflict: Desert Storm 2*. (Although it's not quite enough to rock our kasbah.)



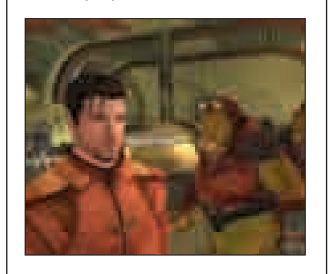
VIEWPOINT
XGRA

So you're not the owner of a GameCube – that doesn't mean you shouldn't be without a damn fast racer. Luckily, Acclaim's bike-based speed freak more than compensates for the lack of Nintendo's franchise. In fact, it's even faster in some places.



VIEWPOINT
STAR WARS: KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC

Don't argue, just listen – this is one of the best *Star Wars* games ever. Yes, ever. Whatever it is they're putting in the water over at BioWare, it must be working. What else could have spawned such a playable *Star Wars* title?



VIEWPOINT
TIGER WOODS 2004

It happens every year, but EA's release of yet another *Tiger Woods* game always seems to coincide with half the people in the **games™** office taking a week off. Lord knows why, though we suspect more than a few birdies get sunk in the process.









GBA

DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
Nintendo

UK LAUNCH DATE
22 June 2001

MEDIA
Flash Cartridge

CURRENT PRICE
£69.99

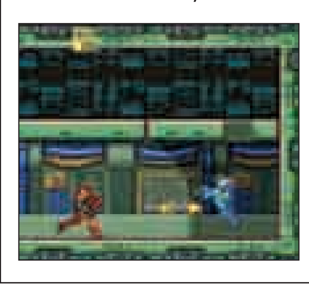


Ideal for gaming on the move, the GBA is a cheap and effective way of getting games to those who don't have time to sit down and play. The leaps in handheld technology mean that GBA games are now more accomplished and can even be compared favourably to their console-based cousins. The lovely SP model is available now.

TOP TEN MUST-HAVE GAME BOY ADVANCE GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Advance Wars 2	Nintendo	In-House
2	Zelda: A Link To The Past/Four Swords	Nintendo	In-House
3	Super Mario Advance 3: Yoshi's Island	Nintendo	In-House
4	Golden Sun: The Lost Age	Nintendo	Camelot
5	Metroid Fusion	Nintendo	In-House
6	Street Fighter Alpha 3	Ubi Soft	Crawfish
7	Castlevania: Aria Of Sorrow	Konami	In-House
8	Pokémon Ruby / Sapphire	Nintendo	In-House
9	Splinter Cell	Ubi Soft	In-House
10	Speedball 2: Brutal Deluxe	Wanadoo	Crawfish

VIEWPOINT
METROID FUSION
Another revisited title that tied in nicely with our sudden desire for all things *Metroid*. For classic Samus, it really doesn't get much better than this. Really.



VIEWPOINT
ADVANCE WARS 2: BLACK HOLE RISING
If the words 'buy' and 'now' haven't formed in your mind after seeing how great *Advance Wars 2* is, you're clearly demented.



PC

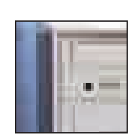
DETAILS

MANUFACTURER
N/A

UK LAUNCH DATE
N/A

MEDIA
4.75-inch CD/DVD Disc

CURRENT PRICE
£variable

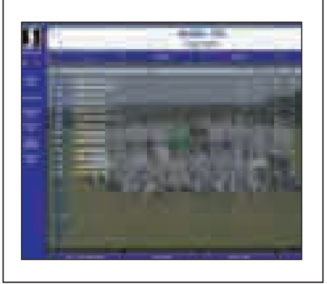


While primarily bought as a work platform, the PC has swiftly become the haven of the more 'mature' gamer. With its natural ability for online and LAN play, it's perfectly tailored for the FPS, strategy and MMORPG genres. However, it can cost a fortune to keep a PC up to date and running fast enough to support flashy graphics.

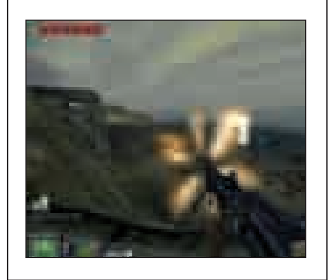
TOP TEN MUST-HAVE PC GAMES

No.	Title	Publisher	Developer
1	Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Rockstar Games	Rockstar North
2	Championship Manager 4	Eidos	Sports Interactive
3	Operation Flashpoint	Codemasters	In-House
4	Rise Of Nations	Microsoft	Big Huge Games
5	Freelancer	Microsoft	Digital Anvil
6	Half-Life	Vivendi	Valve Software
7	The Sims	EA	Maxis
8	Tron 2.0	Disney	Monolith
9	Age Of Mythology	Microsoft	Ensemble Studios
10	Day Of Defeat	Activision	Valve Software

VIEWPOINT
CHAMP MANAGER 4
Still ruling the roost as far as football management goes, the new season can only mean that we've dug out our boots and started training all over again.



VIEWPOINT
DAY OF DEFEAT
Okay, so it hasn't got a single-player mode, but as long as you've got some kind of online connection you'll have all the friends you'll ever need.




NEXT MONTH IN GAMES™
180
PAGES OF
CEL-SHADED BLASTING
EXCELLENCE
ON SALE 06



REVIEWED

XIII

Next stop, Paris. games™ jets off to France to meet the people behind Ubi Soft's cel-shaded attempt to corner the FPS genre. We'll also bring you the definitive review.

NOV 03

NEXT MONTH

MORE… PREVIEWS

Forget those games that you'll be playing in the next month – they're so passé, dah-ling. Instead, we'll be looking forward to the games of 2004 to see if there's anything good on the horizon.

MORE… REVIEWS

The crystal ball says we'll get to review the likes of *Beyond Good & Evil*, *Sands Of Time*, *Half-Life 2* and *Billy Hatcher*. But if we actually manage to get all that in, we'll eat our collective hats.

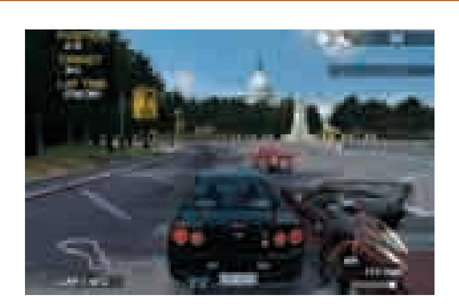
MORE… FEATURES

Importing may have been happening for years, but it's only recently that publishers have started to clamp down. games™ takes a look at the state of import gaming and asks if it could be at risk as the world becomes smaller…

CONTACT
ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

THIS IS WHERE WE HAVE A REST AND LET YOU LOT DO THE TALKING. TO BE HONEST, MOST OF YOU SEEM MORE JADED THAN US BUT AT LEAST YOU'RE AMONGST FRIENDS…

This month a gloom has set about you all and even the sanctuary of the forum has been infected with the notion that gaming is just not what it used to be…



MAKING CONTACT

☐ **There are many wonderful ways to get in touch with games™. The traditional postal method is perfectly acceptable using the address below:**

games™
Highbury – Paragon
Paragon House
St Peter's Road
Bournemouth
BH1 2JS

☐ However, there are quicker ways to reach us thanks to the technological marvel that is the Internet. Email us at this address:
gamestm@paragon.co.uk

☐ Alternatively, why not get yourself on our dedicated forum? Here you should be shielded from multiple spams and infantile remarks. Access to the site has been password protected and only those of you who read **games™** will be able to get onto the site – and if you have bought this magazine then you're not the sort to be abusive and childish, are you? Follow these quick steps to getting on the **games™** forum and enjoy hassle-free chatting with those of us who share a passion for gaming.

☐ **Step One:**
Get yourself online. It's fairly simple, so we're sure you'll think of something.

☐ **Step Two:**
Type the following into the Net browser window:
www.totalgames.net
You will arrive at the Totalgames website. From here click on the forum icon. News users will have to register via the 'new user' icon – it's a simple step-by-step process which we're sure you can manage.

☐ **Step Three:**
Once registered, simply email **gamestm@paragon.co.uk** with the password '**woggle**' and your username. Then a whole world of sophisticated wit and games chat will be yours. It says here.

☐ **ON THE SUBJECT** of a single-format gaming world, as Graham Tarrant dreamt of in issue 8, we have his good points to think of and the rivalry that ensures that game developers push their games. Having a single-format gaming world is very unlikely, possibly impossible. The idea of having all the great games (and bad ones at that) on just the one console is bliss.

Imagine not spending about £300-£500 on several consoles but just paying for one. That would be heaven. But then if we had a single-platform world, where would the competition come from? As **games™** says, without the different consoles we wouldn't have as much innovation or the will to push games as far as we can. Take a look at the games that come from Sony, Microsoft and Nintendo – almost every first-party release is impressive. But with one console, would each developer strive so hard to produce such superlative software? At present, the impetus to make such high-quality games is to promote and sell their consoles.

So surely the cons outweigh the pros of having a single-platform world? I guess that we have become used to the luxury of choice but I'm fairly certain that's because we've always had the choice of platforms and each console manufacturer has had to vie for our attention. But it seems certain that without the console wars we'd never have the classics we have now, surely?
Damien Tuffnell

games™: This is pure speculation, of course, and we'd like to think that Nintendo, for example, would continue to make remarkable software whether it produced its own consoles or not. However, as we're great advocates of choice and we do feel that competition drives innovation we'd tend to agree with you.

☐ **SO INDUSTRY ANALYSTS** reckon that the games industry will be worth £21.9 billion by 2007? I actually wonder if there will be a games industry in 2007. Where can gaming go? Better graphics? Better sound? We're looking at a technological peak in games consoles, particularly with Xbox, so these kinds of advancements should be ruled out. All that's left to improve upon is gameplay, and even that seems unlikely.

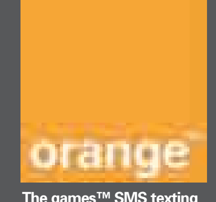
Sequels, cash-ins, updates and just a few innovative games seem to be the order of the day. The advent of 3D gaming did deliver a whole new set of genres that weren't possible before, but it seems that 3D gaming has gone pretty much as far as it can go, so how can developers innovate? Gaming is getting stagnant, overcrowded and uninspiring. How much further can current genres be stretched before people give up on gaming, bored of the same old games? If things don't change, I can foresee the demise of gaming and with it, the death of the games industry.
Matty Foster

"IF WE HAD A SINGLE-PLATFORM WORLD, WHERE WOULD THE COMPETITION COME FROM? WE WOULDN'T HAVE THE INNOVATION"

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Want to go adventuring on the Xbox? Look no further than *Knights Of The Old Republic* – it's a bit good.

games™: It is hard to imagine where games might go in the future, but it's the job of developers to shape and define that – something they've managed to do for over two decades. Certainly there are bog-standard, middle-of-the-road games that don't innovate, but the same can be said of music or films and no-one is suggesting that either is in decline.

Likewise with technology, one thing that you can be certain of is that consoles will continue to become more powerful and that some of the games that we'll experience on them will be very different than those we play today. Take *Gran Turismo* on the PSone. When it appeared in 1998 it was the very pinnacle of the racing genre, to many it looked 'real'. When compared to *Project Gotham Racing 2* it looks slow, tired and ugly. That's progress for you, and while *PGR2* is infinitely prettier than *Gran Turismo* there are also innovations, and the fact that it supports Xbox Live also sets it apart from older racers. Who can imagine what's to come?

Failing that, if videogames do lose their lustre for you, there will be millions of people who currently aren't old enough to have sampled the joys of games or to remember 'retro' games who'll be more than ready come 2007, and to them gaming will be as fresh as ever.

I'D LIKE TO say how much I enjoyed your feature on videogames and television (Screen Play, issue 10). I hurt my neck reading it because I was nodding in agreement all the way through.

The problem appears to be that there is more of a desire for TV to latch on to gaming than there is for gaming to take advantage of TV. The result, of course, is TV's idea of what gamers want to see, but it rarely hits the mark.

If I have to listen to another obviously non-gamer try and wow me with 'yoof' speak while talking out of their backside I swear I will hoof my TV into my imaginary swimming pool. Does TV insult its sports audiences by employing commentators who know nothing about sports? Of course it doesn't. So why do we have to be insulted in this way?

The biggest insult was the recent *GameStars* awards show. This show plumbed new depths in how to alienate its target audience. While listening to an endless stream of C-, D- and Z-list celebs admit that they never played games it dawned on me that *GameStars* was nothing more than an attempt to get in there early to create the gaming Oscars of the future. Pathetic really.

As I watched Jade from *Big Brother* and Trevor McDonald trying to hide their derision, I found myself wondering just why they were invited to announce awards. What were the producers saying about gamers and gaming here? The answer is that *GameStars* (like most gaming TV) said more about the people behind it who clearly know nothing about games, gaming or gaming culture.

Simon Ellis

games™: Maybe, but we have to admit that we know some of the people who were behind *GameStars* and we can assure you that their passion for games is unquestionable. It's just that we reckon they must have had a tough time trying to convince A-list celebs to sign up. As for the state of other gaming shows, well, we think we made our feelings clear in the

CONTACT
ILLUMINATING THE WORLD OF gamesTM

TEXT LIFE…

U fools! U gave away a major plot twist in knight of the old republic, in one of your screenshots! Sheesh!
gamesTM: You're not the only one…

Thanks 4 hiding plot twists for star wars: Kotr in the screen shots for the review. if you could reveal the story lines for all games this way I could save hours
gamesTM: Enough already. We didn't do it on purpose and we're very sorry. The fact is that we freelanced out the review – not something that we do very often – to someone who had played and completed the game. He took it upon himself to take a screen grab of that scene and for those of us who had not played the game it meant little, if anything to us. The git.

I am very distressed. My GamesTM was supposed to arrive at least this morning & it has not. How deisturbing.
gamesTM: Go and make sure the postman isn't reading it at the bottom of the drive.

I wish nintendo and sega would merge, at least then i wouldn't b disillusioned with gaming.
gamesTM: You'd find something else to complain about. Really you would.

No way was Flashback the sequel 2 Another World, the lead characters didn't have they same name! They just came from the same developer.
gamesTM: Sorry, we were either too drunk or too young to remember clearly and now you've got the gamesTM team arguing. Satisfied?

Ive just been playing R-TYPE on my GP32 and was wonderin, whos the best at it in the gamesTM head quarters?
gamesTM: It's between Albiges and Jones.

Please do an article on games that changed a genre. Do a big article on quake 3 arena. The best multi-player game ever! Even though relatively old.
gamesTM: We'll bear it in mind…

Are there any decent Rpg's on the xbox? i've only heard Baldurs gate was any good but i've yet to find it or even read a review of it…
gamesTM: You could try *Knights Of The Old Republic*. Mmm, Lightsabers…

Does Winning Eleven 6 final evolution have a Uk release date for the GC?
gamesTM: Sorry, old bean, but it ain't making making an appearance on these shores.

Stop putting spoilers in your reviews!!!
gamesTM: Oh, for the love of god… SORRY.

"GAMING IS BECOMING STAGNANT, OVERCROWDED AND UNINSPIRING. HOW FAR CAN CURRENT GENRES BE STRETCHED?"

article, and it seems that most gamers agree with us. We're sick of attitude-heavy, content-light shows, and we prefer to hear reviews by someone who's played a game thoroughly, not just read the back of the box. Those of you with cable or satellite can always catch *GamePad*, which is the best show at the moment. We also hear that Challenge TV will be showing the first series of *GamesMaster* from the end of October if all these new-fangled show aren't to your liking…

I FEAR THE worst for the GameCube, what with Nintendo's terrible marketing, poor sales and the like. I think Nintendo ought to blah, blah, blah… I bet anyone who started reading this letter will probably have stopped by now. Why? Because people are fed up of hearing about how badly under-achieving the GameCube is. It's not! Nintendo is making a profit and also making great games.

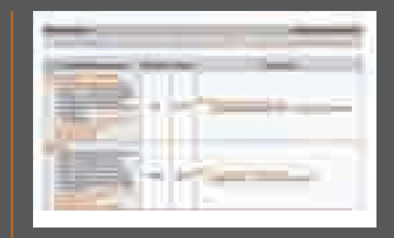
Look at Microsoft – it may have sold more consoles in certain regions but it's losing money on every console it sells. Also, the GameCube may not be doing so well here in Europe, but Microsoft is selling an embarrassingly small amount of Xboxes over in Japan. My main reason for this letter is to try and stop people complaining about the GameCube and its poor sales because it is doing just fine. Oh, and anyone still reading this letter, before you send a letter into some magazine or post a thread on some forum about the GameCube under-achieving, just stop and think – is it doing as badly as we all seem to think?

I have just one question before I finish off my letter. Why does the PS2 continue shifting more consoles than anyone else? I mean, surely the majority of people that have wanted a PS2 will have one by now. You'd think that anyway, with the amount of consoles Sony has sold… There we go, rant over.
C. Miller

gamesTM: A rant about ranting. Marvellous. And would we be right in thinking that you reckon that there's some kind of conspiracy behind the numbers of PS2s sold? Blimey…

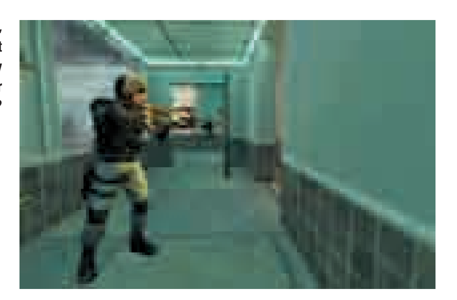
ECTS SCARED ME this year. Ordinarily I look forward to it as it's usually great. The games industry gets together and, much like Mr Wonka, throws open the doors on the goodness that's in store for us. We gasp, we marvel and most of all we wonder if Christmas has come early. The same thing happened this year. Enough glimpses were given to have people quivering with anticipation. Those of us more financially challenged began to write lists for our nearest and dearest whilst wishing the fat bearded one with a tendency to wear red would get a move on. What scared me were the speeches.

I'm usually more than happy to read about developers gushing about their imminent games as this always fuels my anticipation. This year, however, there was a noticeable difference to what was said. Instead of describing the background of a new character, more realistic textures or a new piece of hardware, this year we were also given speeches about market research and how the key to making gaming more accessible is to make games more fun. I think, in relation to the last point, I speak for everyone with an IQ



FROM THE FORUM

We're all doomed and the games market is well shady…



A pretty good game, but surely we want variety and originality to go with our 'me too' games?

higher than one when I say 'Well, duh!'

Tackling the second issue first – making games more fun. Apparently, games would be more fun if they were less complex, not as long and were more pick-up-and-play orientated. Well, I played my share of *Pong*, *Frogger* and *Space Invaders* and I don't particularly want to revisit games from back then. More accessible? Surely there is already a substantially large (some would say huge, given last year's spend in the UK alone) customer base that's still growing. Why start messing with a formula that's already working? Isn't that just greedy?

Changing the way games are made might put existing gamers off and it'll be harder to win back the dedicated players (and I don't mean elite, I mean regular gamers) than to grab the infrequent gamer's notice for five minutes with a flash-in-the-pan gimmicky game.

As for the reports that have been produced that will allow the industry to more accurately gauge what the player wants – well, so long innovation, goodbye originality and hello repetitive clones. I am not a fan of this way of thinking. Okay, so satisfying the customer will bring in the profits and this makes good business sense, but surely if every company is churning out games that fit the research, the thriving games industry could be in danger of becoming like the UK music industry whose death rattle can currently be heard among today's boil-in-the-bag pop group (current life expectancy, two weeks).

I can see it now – some fresh-faced marketing executive will create an online show where gamers vote for which games get made and which do not. Why don't we just scrap every game other than *EverQuest* and *Counter-Strike* while we're at it?

Beware these kinds of trends. If Yoda was more than a muppet he'd probably tell me to quit my griping and bugger off, but if he was more than a muppet and he liked games he'd probably say that trends lead to fashions, fashions lead to conformity, conformity leads to lack of substance and there lies the dark side.

Chris Gregg.

gamesTM: And here lies the problem. Developers and publishers are in it for the money and developing games is becoming an incredibly expensive business. To ensure that games sell well developers and publishers are being pushed into creating games that will have maximum impact at retail, and that generally means sequels, movie tie-ins and 'safe' genres or copycat titles.

Look at the Dreamcast. There was a powerful, capable machine that was home to a glut of original, groundbreaking games and it failed to make much of an impact against the PlayStation and PS2. It deserved better but that's indicative of what's going on today.

There are signs that companies are looking to make gaming a much more mainstream activity – the EyeToy is a prime example of this – but there are still plenty of great original games that are still worthy of your attention. Carp if you will at the tosh that you feel is choking the games industry but there will always be people out there trying to do something different, and as long as we buy their games, we should be okay…

first_samurai

Is it just me or have games been getting a bit stale over the past few years? You know – outstanding graphics, dull gameplay and within a fortnight you've completed everything and your latest game is put on the shelf only to be dusted off when it's become 'retro'. Fortunately, gamers need not despair as there is a light at the end of the tunnel and it is games with cel-shaded graphics.

Love 'em or loathe 'em, I believe cel-shaded graphics are the way forward for videogames. *Zelda* for GameCube was like a breath of fresh sea air upon the ocean, much like the adventure (note adventure, NOT game) that it was. I play games to escape reality and the cartoon-like graphics provide this but don't obstruct the most important factor – personal involvement in the game. Too many of today's games play like nothing more than an interactive movie – you watch them more than you play them (not good).

If you are concerned that cel-shaded can't do grim and gritty, then check out *XIII*. If the previews are to be believed then this game looks set to be as ground-breaking as *Another World* was on the SNES (co-incidentally both of French origin).

For anything to survive it must evolve and games developers should take note, cel-shaded graphics ARE the future. Agree or disagree? What do you think?

get2sammyb

Hmm… Firstly, I don't really think *XIII* represents grim and gritty gaming action. If you are looking for that sort of thing, but like your cel-shaded graphics, why not try *Killer 7*?

Secondly, cel-shading is NOT the way forward for gaming. Yes, I agree it is a nice graphical technique, but because of the speculation *Jet Set Radio* got, developers are simply jumping aboard a bandwagon.

You mention in your post: "Outstanding graphics, dull gameplay". Well, how is cel-shading improving gameplay? It is merely offering outstanding graphics, but it seems what you want is outstanding gameplay. Am I right? You use a classic example. *The Wind Waker* looked very flash. It looked very flash indeed. Was the gameplay great? Well, yes I suppose it was. Did it reach the high standards we have come to expect from Nintendo games? No, it certainly did not.

"For anything to survive it must evolve, games developers should take note, cel-shaded graphics ARE the future." Evolve? So what you mean is we must have more "outstanding graphics" masterpieces with more "dull gameplay"?Cel-shading is a nice graphical effect but cel-shading is not the way forward.

cavalcade

Cel shading = commercial suicide.
It's time to invoke 'Cavalcade's Postulate':
Legned Of Zelda: The Wind Waker = UK Success
Cel Damage = UK Flop
Jet Set Radio = UK Flop
Jet Set Radio Future = UK Flop
Sly Raccoon = UK Flop
Auto Modellista = UK Flop
Robotech Battlecry = UK Flop
Looney Tunes Space Race = UK Flop
Ready 2 Rumble = UK Flop
Therefore: UK Cel Shading Likelihood Of Success (%) = UK Success ÷ (z x (UK Flop)) x 100
Where 'z' is currently equal to eight, considering the list above. Clearly, even taking into account the possibility that the games were gash anyway, Cavalcade's Postulate proves conclusively that cel-shading means commercial suicide. Look out for the full paper in next month's *New Scientist*.


game over!
Waah! Waah!


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06/11/03